



to Mrs Thely
with best wishes
from the translator

Presented to me
by
Max Hölz
MAGNITOGORSK, USSR.
MARCH 19, 1931.

(J. H. Glick)

**FROM WHITE CROSS TO
RED FLAG**



MAX HOELZ

FROM WHITE CROSS TO RED FLAG

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
MAX HOELZ
WAITER, SOLDIER,
REVOLUTIONARY LEADER



Translated from the German
by F. A. VOIGT

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I N T R O D U C T O R Y N O T E

MAX HOELZ has been called a number of things – bandit, highwayman, Robin Hood, murderer, idealist, revolutionary hero, and what not. One thing is certain – he was not guilty of the murder for which he was sentenced to penal servitude for life. Thanks to the efforts of his friends, no doubt was left about his innocence on that one charge and he was released after serving eight years of his sentence.

Whether he was not guilty of other offences – arson, treason, breaches of the peace and so on – is another question. And whether he was not morally guilty in a sense transcending the written law, whether it was not a crime on his part to lead simple-minded workmen into hopeless battles even if he did not think them hopeless or useless, is also another question. In times of revolution and counter-revolution human guilt is very relative. ‘In revolutions,’ so Macaulay wrote of Clarendon, ‘men live fast: the experience of years is crowded into hours: old habits of thought and action are violently broken; and novelties which at first sight inspire dread and disgust, become in a few days familiar, endurable, attractive. Many men of far purer virtue and higher spirit than Clarendon were prepared,

before that memorable year ended, to do what they would have pronounced wicked and infamous when it began.'

Max Hoelz had a passionate – perhaps even a pathological – conviction. He did nothing for his own material advantage. His punishment was terrible, but he bore it with great courage. In the light of after years what he did as a revolutionary was, no doubt, foolish, useless, and even criminal, having been conceived in too simple and crude a spirit. But for his exposure of German prison conditions he deserves the thanks of all his fellow prisoners, indeed of all his fellow countrymen.

Perhaps the most fitting epithet conferred upon Max Hoelz is not any of those that condemn or praise, but simply the German Robin Hood. Like Robin Hood, or at least the Robin Hood of legend, he robbed the rich and gave to the poor although he may have done more harm than good to those he wished to help. And, like Robin Hood, he himself became a legend – in the poverty-stricken regions round Plauen and Zwickau the legend lives and no one speaking at political meetings attended by the poor in those parts will with impunity say a word against Max Hoelz.

FROM WHITE CROSS TO
RED FLAG

CHAPTER I

C H I L D H O O D

SOME people remember hundreds of details about their earliest childhood as long as they live. But there are others whose early memories have paled like a fading pattern before they have reached middle age.

I only remember a few events and impressions of my childhood, but of these few there are several that had a very distinct influence on my development.

I do not remember my birthplace, Moritz, near Riesa. I was born on the 14th October, 1889. My father was a workman in a sawmill, and we left Riesa when he had found another job at Hirschstein on the Elbe. I was then between one and two years of age.

The Hirschstein estate, with its impressive castle, built like a ship on a very high rock that descended steeply to the bank of the Elbe, belonged to a captain of the Grossenheim Hussars, named Crusius. For several years my father was employed as a farm hand on this very big estate. My mother worked, too, as a day labourer.

I remember how I used to bring my father his

meals when I was a boy of four. He would sometimes reward me by lifting me on to the back of one of the horses in the team.

As neither father nor mother could look after the children during the day (there were four of us by then), we were often locked up in the room all day long, so that we should do no mischief outside, but for any pranks in the house we used to be cruelly beaten. For the slightest piece of misconduct or even for the slightest mistake, we were punished either by our father or by our mother. A heavy leather belt would descend sharply on our bare bottoms, and we would be sent to bed hungry, or be tied to a chair for hours, for half a day, or sometimes even for a whole day, and so tightly that it was impossible for us to get loose.

I did not have the feeling then, when I was a child, nor have I the feeling now I am grown-up, that our parents served out these hard punishments through any special cruelty or lack of affection. These were just the educational methods of the day, particularly in the country districts. Both father and mother were exceedingly conscientious and orderly, and they had to take precautions to prevent our mischief and our pranks from doing damage either to our neighbours or to the owner of the estate.

I shall never forget the trouble my mother took to teach me how to read, long before I went to the village school. During the day she worked hard in the fields. She had to cook for the whole family

and she had to patch up the clothes which we children – there were six of us later on – used to wear out or tear. She could therefore give little time to our mental and physical development. But the few hours that did remain she used with such intensity that once, when I was five, I ran away from her and solemnly declared that I would throw myself into the Elbe. She had carried out her task of teaching me to read with too much manual activity. But when I went to the village school I could read better than all the others. The school was at Bahre, an hour's walk from Hirschstein.

After six months my father left his job on the estate, and we moved with all our household possessions, which were loaded on a cart, to the village of Piestewitz, where my father worked as farmhand and day labourer on a fairly large estate. At Piestewitz he was knocked down by a runaway team of horses, and was confined to bed for months. When he was well again he got a job as driver at a brewery at Zahren, near Meissen.

Then we went another day's journey with the cart to Leutewitz, near Riesa. Here my father worked as a farm hand on another estate.

I was a little over seven, and had to work in the fields, watch the geese and cows, pick up the potatoes behind the machine, or pull up the turnips and cut them into pieces.

We only stayed at Leutewitz for a short while. After less than a year father got another job, and we went to the village of Heyda. There he worked on

a big farm for five years. Later on he got a job at a tile works. At Heyda I finished school.

During the eight years that I was at school I could seldom do my tasks. We children were usually absent, helping our parents to earn money by working with them on the farm. Even when we did go to school we had to go to the fields with our books after school hours, and labour until late in the evening. When we returned home with our parents we were so dead tired that there could be no thought of homework. We gladly obeyed the order: 'Get off to bed.'

Although our parents were industrious and lived very economically – my father was never without a job – and although we children had to help earn a living, there were times when there was not enough to go round. It often happened that we did not even have any dry bread in the house. We who dunged, ploughed and sowed, and then reaped the harvest for the employer, were often without the barest necessities of life.

Sometimes our mother undertook the following expedient so as not to let us go hungry for days: I would go to the only baker in the village with two pfennige,* and tell him a story about a beggar who had sent me to get two pfennige worth of stale bread. We were ashamed to admit that we wanted the bread for ourselves. This stale bread was almost as hard as a bone, and no one else ever bought it. The baker would give me one or two pounds of it

* A farthing.

for two pfennige, whereas a fresh pound loaf would cost fourteen or fifteen pfennige. Mother would make us some soup with which we ate the stale bits.

The senselessness of such conditions was not apparent to me when I was a child. My parents were not class conscious enough to realise the causes of this existence and to rebel against it. Nevertheless my father was no boot-licker. Whenever some squire, flunkey, or inspector spoke to him roughly without cause, he resolutely threw down his tools, and looked for another job. He never had any difficulty in finding one, for he was known as a conscientious and industrious workman. The strictly religious views of my parents did not allow them to kick against the pricks. They thought that the divine order of things was such that there were masters and servants, and the servant had to remain a servant, and remain all his life in poverty and want, but that a better fate awaited him hereafter.

The bitterest need often came upon our family, especially when illness used up the few pfennige we had saved. There was no sickness insurance then, and the expenses of doctors and medicines had to be met out of our wretched earnings.

My father earned eight marks* a week. He had to work from four in the morning until nine or ten at night, Sundays included. He had no relaxation, no pleasure. During the whole of his life he did not once go into a public house. His only luxury

* Eight shillings.

was on a few Sundays in the year when he did not have to work on the farm between two and five in the afternoon. He would then sit on the sofa and smoke a small cigar, the fragrance of which was enjoyed by the whole family. To smoke a cigar on weekdays would have seemed criminal extravagance to him.

The bigger we children grew, and the more we worked in the fields, the more clothes our mother had to get and patch up for us. I never had a new suit, neither a jacket nor knickerbockers, until I was fourteen. Mother made our clothes out of old pieces of cloth, or old suits or coats belonging to our father or to our grandparents. Thus it was a tremendous event for me, when, at my confirmation, I wore a brand new suit for the first time in my life – a suit made by a tailor. It impressed me much more than the whole confirmation, although I took that very seriously, for, being a child, I had no religious doubts.

By the time I was fourteen I had taken part in three children's treats – once we made a school excursion to a ruined monastery in the neighbourhood ; another time we saw a sort of dolls' theatre, in which the Dreyfus case was reproduced. It made a lasting impression on me. The third time, just before I left school, I went to see a waxworks at a fair in a neighbouring town. My father had given me twenty pfennige for the purpose. To me it was an event of the first order, and one that aroused the envy of all my brothers and sisters.

On Saturday evenings I usually went with my basket on my back an hour's walk to the town, and bought barley, millet, peas, beans and lentils for the whole week. Sometimes I would buy half a pound of horse meat. Whenever this happened mother would make us a Sunday dinner of roast horseflesh served up with bits of hard bread softened by soaking.

In the spring, when violets blossomed beside the brooks and behind the hedges that surrounded the fields, we had to gather little bunches and sell them in the town. Once, when I was passing from door to door with a basket of violets, I found a twenty-mark piece on the steps leading up to an inn. I took it home to my parents, who, in spite of their poverty, did not keep the money, but put an advertisement in the newspapers in the hope that the owner might be found.

On Sunday mornings, whenever we were not at work in the fields (we often worked on Sundays), we went to church with our parents. To us children as well as to our parents, religion was a very serious matter. It was quite unthinkable for us to go to sleep without having said our evening prayer, or to begin the day without a morning prayer. Father was always the first to dip his spoon in the morning, noon, or evening soup, and when he did so we all sang grace in chorus, and we never forgot our prayer of thanksgiving after each slender meal.

Our parents were anything but hypocrites. They never displayed their religion, and, in spite of their

own great want, they gave freely to those who had less than they.

My mother's father had been fatally injured during blasting operations in a quarry. My grandmother still lived in Hirschstein, and I often had to take her meals there in a basket – it was three hours' walk from Heyda – so I hardly had any time to share in the games of the other village children. When I tried to do so, I was always looked upon as an outsider. My schoolmates teased me in a manner that oppressed me very much. They used to laugh at my father's cast-off clothing which my mother had sewn together and patched up so as to make it fit me. I was often driven to desperation. One Sunday I was so jeered at and laughed at because my coat was so very different from those of the others, that I flew into a rage. About a dozen schoolmates surrounded me. I picked up a stone as big as a fist, but instead of throwing it at them I hammered the fingers of my left hand with it until it was all bloody, and screamed, with my eyes full of tears, shouting that I would smash all my fingers if they did not stop laughing at me. They were so impressed that I had a respite from their mockery for a long time afterwards.

When I left the village school I longed to be a locksmith. I wanted some real employment, because I hoped to support my parents later on. I knew that I could never do so if I became a labourer or an unskilled workman, for I would then earn hardly enough to keep even myself alive

My parents were an example of this, for in spite of their hard work and thrift they lived in poverty.

But I could not learn a trade, because my parents had no money to pay apprentice's fees, or to buy the new clothes I would need. Nor would I have been able to earn anything for three years. So it seemed that I would have to follow exactly the same path as my father.

After my confirmation I got a job as a farm hand at Leutewitz near Riesa. I spent three years working for a farmer named Klotzsche. Two of his men had been called up for military service. He could not find any to replace them at once, so I had to do heavy work that should really have been done by older and stronger men than I. Nevertheless I liked farming and took pleasure in everything connected with it. But I was thrashed a good deal, for the younger hands were treated like recruits in the army. The elders took it for granted that unless we were thrashed now and again we would never grow up to be real men.

One of the farm hands was only a year older than I. He was a townsman, and the work was too heavy for him. He was not at all strong either, and he had a chronic bladder complaint. The other hands who shared his bed — we always slept two or three in a bed — would declare that he was too lazy to get up. They thrashed him almost daily in a most inhuman fashion. The poor fellow became an imbecile and a cripple under this treatment.

CHAPTER II

I RUN AWAY

ALTHOUGH I liked farming I never ceased looking for other employment and better wages, but only after two years did I succeed in getting a job as a manservant in an inn at Riesa. I left this job after three months to do the first independent thing I ever did in my life. It was my intention to run away to Baden-Baden. My mother had been a nurse there when she was young, and told us children wonders of this town, which had thus become the city of my dreams. But the little money I had only lasted me as far as Heidelberg. I had to break off my journey there, and I found a job as a 'boots' in the Hotel 'Bayrischer Hof.' While I had this job I got a very bad blood poisoning. My entire arm was to be amputated, but I protested, and was taken to the University Clinic, where my arm was saved.

Two months later, when I was well again, I left Heidelberg and travelled to Baden-Baden. I found a job as manservant in the Villa Charlotte, where a rich factory owner lived. I hoped that here I would at least find a few free hours in which I could continue my education, and, if I could save a little money, perhaps learn a profession. But there could

be no thought of free time. I had to beat the carpets, keep the large garden in order, polish the boots and shoes of all the family, wash and scrub, and push the lame wife of the factory owner along the walks of the garden in a bath-chair.

I worked at this job for only a few months, and then went into a garage as an apprentice. The older chauffeurs used to thrash me a good deal, and when things grew too lively I ran away. I got a job as a lift-boy in the 'Villa Pension Louise Höhe.' In the smart uniform and bright buttons I thought myself immensely important, the more so as I now got into touch with people who lived in quite another world, and who had quite different standards. My wages were good, and after a few weeks I could start a savings account. My savings soon amounted to more than a hundred marks; to me this was a fortune.

While I had this job I began a number of deals that oppressed me mentally for a long time afterwards, for they seemed like swindling to me. The lift-boys, doorkeepers, and menservants in the hotels and pensions all did a little extra business with the cabmen. The cabman who was fetched by a door-keeper or lift-boy would give him a percentage, although to do so was strictly prohibited. When my boss heard of this by a mere chance, he asked me to come into his office, and he gave me such a lecture that I thought myself a big criminal. I would not have been astonished if he had had me arrested on the spot. I was so ashamed that I could not stand it any longer, and gave notice. I took my

hundred and twenty marks out of the savings bank, and bought a little handbag, and without any preparations of any kind I travelled *via* Cologne, Rotterdam, Hook of Holland, to London.

The change from Baden-Baden to London was so big that I could not get over my astonishment when I arrived. This astonishment must have been visible on my face, for a dozen people at once followed at my heels offering their services, and insisting on carrying my little handbag, which hardly weighed four pounds, for me. An English policeman observed my lack of town experience and took pity on me. With a few words of English which I had learned as a lift-boy in Baden-Baden I explained to him that I wanted to go to a certain street where there was a German Home.

The policeman escorted me to a horse omnibus, and told the conductor the name of the street. After a drive of several hours I noticed that the street had the same name as the one I wanted, but that nevertheless it was a different street altogether. There were, I was told later on, twenty-seven streets of this name in London. Again a policeman came like a guardian angel, and put me into a cab, a two-wheeled hansom, and at last I reached my goal, the German Waiters' Home. I found good and cheap accommodation there, and efforts were made to find work for me as quickly as possible. A fellow countryman of mine who had been in London for some time, and had no job except showing newcomers round the town, gave me a good deal of attention.

He and others soon discovered that I still possessed several gold coins, and they helped me in spending this small capital. For days they would drive round London with me at my expense. During one of the interesting but exciting and tiring trips we finished up at Hyde Park, just as night was beginning to fall. On the wide expanse of grass I saw dark spots moving about. In answer to my questions whether these were sheep or other animals which were moving about freely to graze the only answer I got was a good deal of laughter. It was something quite different, I was told, but I would soon learn the secret. My companion walked with me to one of the dark spots, and to my indescribable astonishment I saw that these dark spots were nothing other than pairs of lovers.

My small savings were quickly used up, and I was faced with the serious problem of finding an occupation. I finally found a job as a kitchen boy in one of the many thousands of London boarding houses. My wages were two and a half shillings a week, plus food and clothing. The food was so meagre that I would certainly have starved if I had not robbed the stingy old proprietress whenever I had a chance. I stole bread, potatoes, and sweets whenever I could do so unnoticed. I was really a maid-of-all-work, and had as much work as three people could have done. I was obliged to get up at six o'clock in the morning and to sweep and clean the steps leading up to the house. It was bitterly cold. Then I polished the door handles and door knockers, and

twice a week I cleaned the windows. I brought the coal up from the cellar, washed the dishes, beat the carpets, and cleaned the boots. There was plenty of work, and I was often scolded.

The skinny old proprietress treated me with contempt. She did not even think it necessary to hand my food to me or to put it on the table. Every noon I was given a piece of meat about as large as a thumb, and a few potatoes.

I could not stand this life for long, but I was obliged to take similar jobs in a number of boarding houses before I finally succeeded in finding a place as a kitchen boy in the household of two sisters, Americans who lived in Chelsea. They treated me well, there was plenty of food, and I had a few free hours every day.

I bought some English books and tried to read the papers. I went as often as I could to the many fine public libraries.

One of the American women realised that I was trying to get on in the world and that I was interested in technical problems, and eager to find an opportunity of educating myself. She introduced me to a London cab syndicate, which gave me a job as a carriage cleaner. This job consisted entirely of night work, and I was paid twelve shillings a week. This seemed like a large income, and was sufficient for my needs.

Then I answered the advertisement of a city engineer who was looking for an apprentice, and was given the job. I worked in this office from nine

in the morning until three in the afternoon, and made small drawings and blue-prints for railroad construction which the engineer was directing in South America.

In the late afternoons and evening I attended the Polytechnic Institute in Chelsea, where the instructors showed a great deal of understanding for my difficult situation. The instructor in bridge-building in particular, made a great effort to help me when he realised that I did not as yet speak English well enough to understand the lectures without difficulty. Sometimes he would sit down next to me and translate the technical idioms. I was the only German among about thirty students.

I soon realised that my twelve shillings a week were not sufficient, for I needed books and drawing material. My parents, who did not harbour the slightest resentment because I had left home secretly, helped me as much as they could. They sent me a box of mathematical instruments, and some books, and once they sent me a few marks. There were times, however, during which for days I had no food at all, because I was penniless. Once, on my way home from the office, I fainted because I had had no food for three days. I was carried into a house, and a postman, who was among the crowd which had collected, realised what was the matter with me. He took me home, where I was received by his family in a most friendly manner. After that my situation was considerably improved.

Later, through the two American women, I met

an English clergyman named Beardmore, who had once studied for a week in Dresden. He was a real friend. I am enormously indebted to this man, who helped me in every way, and who encouraged my studies. He urged me to join an English swimming club. I did not know how to swim, although I was born only a few yards away from the Elbe, and though I had lived in villages near the Elbe for sixteen years. Now I decided to make up for lost time, so I bathed every morning in the Serpentine in Hyde Park until late in the winter.

I do not think I could have stood this winter bathing if two Englishmen had not been my companions. One of them, a man of sixty-five, who looked forty, had been bathing in the Serpentine both summer and winter for years. We chopped away the ice together, and thus made it possible for us to bathe even on the coldest days. In a swimming contest a few weeks later, I won a prize, a silver medal, for speed. I was very proud of this medal, especially as I was the only German in the club. A little while later, however, when I was again hard up, I was obliged to take this medal to a pawn-shop.

As I saw only English people I spoke English well enough within a few months, so that I could follow the lectures at the Polytechnic Institute without any trouble.

After I had been in London for not quite two years I returned to Germany, because the time for my military service had arrived. At the same time

I was acting according to the urgent wish of my parents, who had never really accepted the idea of my journey to a foreign country. I learnt from my sister that my mother fainted when she heard that I had gone to England.

Germany was a great disappointment to me. Life in Berlin, where I went first, did not seem nearly as fine as life in London. In England when I was applying for a job, no one asked me who my father was, what schools I had attended, or whether I was a Jew or a Gentile. In Germany, on the other hand, all these questions were asked before a man was employed. In the technical offices where I looked for a job my chances were diminished when I said that my father was a farm labourer. Frequently potential employers were even contemptuous of my lowly origin.

In England a man was taken for what he was. He was judged according to his own ability, and not according to the profession or position of his father. In Germany the questions concerning a man's parents, his brothers and sisters, his grandfather and grandmother, as well as the testimonials, often decided whether a man was given a job or not.

As I could find no job as a draughtsman, I decided to accept a post as an errand boy and dishwasher in a restaurant called the 'Architects' House' in the Wilhelmstrasse. Here I came into contact with my colleagues – for I wanted one day to be a constructional engineer myself – by at least washing their dishes and glasses.

Four weeks later I found employment in the Werner works of the Siemens and Halske Company, but here, too, I was employed as a waiter rather than as a draughtsman. I brought the food into the works' canteen on foodcarts and placed it on the tables. At this time I was making continuous efforts to find some job in which I might use the knowledge I had acquired in London. Finally, through an acquaintance, I met a department manager in the railway construction firm of Arthur Koppel, in the Dorotheenstrasse, who did not ask me any questions about my origin, my life, or my grandparents. Instead he gave me an opportunity to show what I could do. After I had made some sample drawings and plans in his presence he offered me a job. When I was working for this firm I took evening courses in preparation for the 'one year's service' examination.* To continue my technical education I also went to the City Craft School (*Staedtische Handwerkerschule*) a few evenings a week.

In Berlin, as in London, I joined the Y.M.C.A. The Y.M.C.A. in Berlin was situated in the Wilhelmstrasse, and was a large building with big rooms. I went regularly to the Y.M.C.A., where I found many progressive friends, who were all anxious to get on in the world. I had no friends or acquaintances except those whom I met at the Y.M.C.A. I avoided women assiduously. At that time I considered any relations with women outside marriage

* Recruits who had passed this examination had to serve only one year in the army instead of two.

as immoral and wicked. My erotic desires, on the other hand – I was only twenty-one – were very strong, so I joined the ‘White Cross,’ a Lutheran ‘Chastity League.’ During my six months probation period, before I was received as a member, I was obliged to confess my sexual thoughts and actions daily to the head of the League. After six months of ‘purification’ I was accepted as a member of the League in a very solemn meeting. I was a member until the War began.

Six months later the firm of Arthur Koppel was absorbed in the firm of Orenstein zur Orenstein. Many employées were dismissed as a result of this amalgamation. I escaped unemployment, and was given a job in an associated firm, the railroad construction company of Hermann Bachstein. This firm sent two engineers and myself to the Bavarian Upper Palatinate, where we worked in the construction of a narrow gauge railway which was to connect Neuenberg with Obervichtach and Schönsee. I was passionately interested in my work, chiefly because it enabled me to be out of doors all day long. Our work consisted chiefly in surveying. At last I was able to make some practical use of the knowledge I had acquired in London with such difficulty.

The preliminary surveys for the construction of this railway took about a year.

When it was completed the engineers and I were to return to the Berlin office to complete the drawings and calculations necessary for building the railway,

which was to begin in the spring. The engineers, however, urged me to spend all my effort and energy on passing an examination in Germany. They said that I would be able to find a good job much more easily.

I went to Dresden to continue my studies. Here I looked for a job which would leave me enough time to attend a night-school. At the same time I was, of course, obliged to earn my living and to pay for my courses.

It was very difficult to find a suitable job. It was almost impossible to find any work at all in Dresden. I stood for hours in front of newspaper counters with hundreds of other unemployed. Available jobs were announced in these newspaper offices. As soon as an address was given I dashed through the city so as to be the first to apply.

I had soon used up all my savings, and the more shabby my clothes became the less chance there seemed to be of finding a job. I owned only one pair of shoes, and the soles were worn through. The February days were so cold and wet that I hardly dared to go out.

I finally found a job as a skittle-boy, in order to earn enough money to have my shoes soled and to buy some food. From nine in the evening until two in the morning I set up ninepins for the dull and narrow-minded townsmen. My wages were seventy-five pfennige for the entire evening. Usually little boys between nine and thirteen years of age act as skittle-boys. The skittle-alley was so low-

roofed that I was obliged to stoop all the time. Every time I tried to stand up I knocked my head against the low ceiling.

Soon I became so miserable with chronic nosebleeding that I was forced to give up this job. I had, at least, earned enough money to pay the ten marks rent for my attic room and to buy myself a warm meal in the municipal kitchen. I had also had my shoes mended. I went to the shoemaker's, took off my shoes, and waited until he had repaired the soles.

At last, after searching for months, I found a job in a little cinema theatre. From eight in the evening until midnight I attended to the projector. For this work, in a frightfully narrow and hot iron safe cabin in which the blinding light hurt the eyes, I was paid twenty-five marks a week. This was more than I had expected, and it enabled me to pay for my tuition, buy books, and have a warm meal almost every day.

Immediately after my arrival in Dresden I again joined the Y.M.C.A., where I spent my free time and enjoyed a certain amount of companionship. Two members of the Y.M.C.A. who were students at the Technical High School, one an Italian and the other a German from Leipzig, took an interest in me and gave me lessons free of charge. The superintendent of the Y.M.C.A., named Herzog, who sympathised with my desire to get on, showed me many kindnesses.

I attended the Institute which prepared young

men for the 'one year's service examination.' During the day I attended courses at this Institute, in the evening I worked at the cinema, and at night I worked at my studies for the next day. I had little time for sleep. Often in the morning I used to wake up fully dressed and bending over my books.

This strenuous life continued for about a year. Then my health broke down. The recruiting commission, which had passed me as fit for service the last time, now declared me as unfit for service on account of incipient tuberculosis. My health had deteriorated to such an extent that the doctor whom I consulted insisted upon my changing my mode of life. They urged me to leave Dresden and to move to some well-wooded district.

I realised that the doctors were right, and at the end of 1912 I moved to Falkenstein in the Vogtland. Here I found employment in a surveyor's office. In the evening I worked in a picture theatre, my job being to introduce the pictures and explain them to the public. In my spare time I tried to continue my studies.

CHAPTER III

W A R

WHEN the war began I was in Falkenstein. I was not enthusiastic about the war, but my reasons for opposing it were purely religious ones. This antipathy towards the war was increased by the scenes I witnessed early in August.

On the 6th of August the city was in a state of excitement. A good patriot had reported that a motor car filled with armed spies was on its way to the city. He said that these spies were about to blow up the reservoir near Falkenstein, so that huge quantities of water would flood the town. The moment this rumour started the streets of the town were so crowded that they had to be roped off. The townsmen were wild with fury and patriotic ecstasy. They marched through the streets led by an ironmonger called Kiesting, who was carrying a sporting gun. The other patriots had armed themselves with sticks and other objects which could be used for dealing blows.

The motor car expected by the excited populace actually arrived. The principal road of the town was

roped off with heavy chains, and the hysterical mob ran towards the motor car shouting like wild Indians. The car actually did contain a number of rifles, apart from the six passengers; so it was assumed that these passengers were spies. The perfervidly patriotic inhabitants of the town refused to listen to the explanations of the men in the motor car. Instead the crowd pulled the driver out of the car through the windscreen, so that the glass cut his head. Then, because he looked like a foreigner, they beat him until he collapsed, bleeding from many wounds.

The heroes dragged the 'prisoners' to the Town Hall, where the man who was most seriously hurt proved to be the chief engineer of the electrical works in Bergen, a town not far from Falkenstein. It was these electrical works, in fact, which supplied the city of Falkenstein with light and power. The chief engineer had been ordered by the military authorities to go to Plauen and fetch some rifles in order to defend the electrical works from possible enemy attacks. This chief engineer, too, was afraid of spies.

As I belonged to the 2nd Reserve, I enquired at the district army headquarters when I would be called up for military service. I was told it would be on the ninth day after mobilisation. When I asked whether I could choose the army corps to which I wanted to belong, I was told that I could not do so. I thought it over and decided that if I was to be called up on the ninth day in any case, it

would be wiser to volunteer a few days sooner, so that I could choose my own regiment. I therefore left at once for the garrison situated in Grossenhain, a town near my home, and volunteered to serve with the 18th King's Hussars Regiment. My military service began on the 10th of August.

Early in October, after a short period of training, I was sent to the front with the 27th Reserve Army Corps. This army corps, which had just been organised, was commanded by General von Carlowitz, who was the Saxony Minister for War. Along with ten other Hussar privates, I was appointed as one of the general's bodyguard.

At Ypres, in October, 1914, for the first time we were in action against the English. I was now able to compare the high-flown speeches at home with actual conditions at the front.

On our way to the front, near the little town of Ledeghem, we saw the bodies of twelve inhabitants of the town who had been shot. Two little girls of about ten and twelve years of age were among them. These people had not fallen in battle; they had simply been shot down by German soldiers. When we asked an officer why these civilians had been shot we were told that they were *francs-tireurs*. We were also told that a German lieutenant had been shot by one of the children while one of the women had distracted his attention by asking him the time.

We were quartered in Ledeghem, and learned to know the inhabitants of the town. We soon found out that the accusations against the civilians who

had been shot were untrue. The German soldiers were so drunk from the wine and beer they had stolen in the city where they had been quartered last, that when they approached Ledeghem they mistook the curious helmet-shaped chimney stacks for *francs-tireurs*.

While we were marching towards Ypres the commanding general and his staff were frequently under fire. As soon, however, as the actual battle began, the General Staff moved to safe quarters behind the lines, and the life led by these officers was repulsive. Carlowitz himself, as well as his successor, General von Schubert, were not so bad, but the other officers on the General Staff drank, gambled, and carried on with women to such an extent that the German privates, as well as the inhabitants of the enemy towns, lost every vestige of respect for the German officers. Officers who had never even seen the enemy boasted about the Iron Cross with which they had been decorated. A military policeman, who was so fat that, as we always said, three men could not encircle his waist, had actually received the Iron Cross for some espionage service, because, as he told us, a heavy bomb had exploded five yards away from him without hurting him in the least.

During the battle of Zonnebeke many French prisoners were taken. They were marched past the General Staff in hordes. The general and his staff were in their motor cars down the road. The Uhlans were ordered to take the English prisoners

to the base. The Uhlans took special pleasure in poking the English prisoners' legs and backs with their lances. Once a Uhlan kicked a little English prisoner marching at the end of the group. The Uhlan kicked him in the spine with his right foot until the prisoner collapsed. I went over to the prisoner and said a few words to him in English. The Uhlan at once went over to an officer and reported my action to him. The officer roared at me in the presence of all the other soldiers, and thenceforward I was considered a dangerous fellow who made friends with the enemy.

During a big offensive in the summer of 1915, the German troops pushed forward across the enemy lines into an area which had been occupied by the French and the English. We marched over a field of corpses. Hundreds of dead Frenchmen, Englishmen, and Germans had been lying about for months without being buried. Their bodies were black and swollen, and a thick yellow fluid was dropping from the eyepits. The smell was horrible, and we could not bear it even for a few moments without pressing our handkerchiefs to our noses and mouths.

I was so agitated by this sight that I began to wonder what use this butchery could have for anyone. At Ypres, and later on during the battle of the Somme, I was increasingly tormented by this question. I saw men who did not know each other, and who had never done each other any harm, simply shooting each other down. I realised that things were not as they should be. My experiences

at the front gradually taught me that we were not fighting for any real cause.

I could not talk to my fellow soldiers. They did not understand my depression or my doubts. My situation was all the more difficult because I did not join in their card games or other amusements. My reserve, and the fact that I read the New Testament so frequently, gave them cause for amusement. Two older privates in particular made my life a burden. Once one of them struck my mouth with a heavy bridle-bit. I was so desperate that I very nearly shot myself. For many years I had accepted ill-treatment quietly, because as a good Christian I thought I had no right to hit back. I was not by nature a revengeful person. Suddenly, however, my nature changed. One night the two older privates again began to make fun of me and to strike me. They would not leave me alone, although I was very tired. Suddenly I jumped up and in great excitement grabbed one of them by the throat and shouted that I would kill him if he did not leave me alone. My 'comrades' were so surprised at this change that thereafter they did not bother me so much.

The terrible experiences of the war caused me to question the truth of the Christian religion. My new doubts with regard to Divine Providence caused me to defend myself energetically against any bad treatment. Instead of turning the other cheek I struck at everyone twice who had struck me once.

I had consistently tried to do my duty as a

so-called soldier, but I began to question whether this duty was compatible with the principles of true humanity.

When I saw English prisoners or English soldiers who had been killed, I always thought of the kindness which many people had shown me in England. My thoughts became so confused that I could hardly clarify them. After my religious doubts had shaken my whole point of view I found it necessary to think everything over carefully.

I had been taught that there must be rich and poor in the world, and that the poor, as a compensation for their poverty in this world, would be happy in heaven. At the front I realised that there are only oppressed and oppressors in the world.

I grew more and more disgusted with the General Staff. I asked to be transferred to an infantry regiment nearer the front line. My request was refused, on the grounds that it was not proper to transfer from the cavalry to the infantry. After repeating my request a number of times, I was finally ordered to report to the 106th Reserve Infantry Brigade as despatch rider.

Now I shared my fellow soldiers' hardships and deprivations at the front. I was glad of this, for they had envied me when I was still with the General Staff. I received the Iron Cross and the Friedrich-August Medal, and took part in the 27th Reserve Army Corps' 1917 advances on the Eastern and the Western fronts. During the Russian advance I met a Socialist for the first time in my life. Through a

curious chance I came into very close contact with him. It was Georg Schumann, the editor of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. He had been at the front as a private, but had been denounced as a traitor and was now to be tried by the court-martial of his division. A few of my comrades and I were ordered to guard Georg Schumann every day. Though it was against all orders to talk to prisoners, we spoke with him constantly. He made no secret of his socialistic and revolutionary attitude; on the contrary, he tried to win us for his cause.

Schumann's ideas were so new and overpowering, as far as I was concerned, that they seemed to open up another world. I did not understand everything he said, but he stimulated me to thought and showed me the way towards a new philosophy. The public prosecutor demanded twelve years penal servitude as a punishment for Schumann's 'disintegrating influence' in the army, but he was only sentenced to six months imprisonment

During the Russian advance, near the Russian-Galician border, we soldiers heard the first reports about the outbreak of the Russian Revolution. The news, told by Russian prisoners, that Soldiers' and Workers' Councils had been formed in Russia, made a tremendous impression even on those of us who were not Socialists. Even those of us who had never thought about Socialism – and I, after all, was one of them – believed that the results of the revolution would not be confined to Russia. Almost all of us were filled with the same thought: this, at

least, was the beginning of the end of the war. At this time so many Germans fraternised with the Russians that a number of the German regiments were sent back to the Western front.

Towards the end of the spring offensive in 1918, the division to which I belonged advanced towards Cambrai. The food difficulties had reached their height. Our daily ration consisted of a table-spoonful of turnip jam. We were given such a small bread ration that we were left hardly strong enough to stand on our feet. Actually we were forced to march between twenty-five and thirty miles daily.

Dozens of dead horses were strewn about in the glaring sun on the roads and fields. The soldiers cut huge pieces out of these carcases and cooked them, but they were always under-done or even half raw, and there was rarely any salt or any other ingredient. They ate this food greedily to still their terrible hunger. Though I was tormented by hunger I could not eat horseflesh, even though, as a child, horsemeat was the only meat I ever ate. In my youth I considered it a very special delicacy. Once, at the front, I tried to eat some horse meat which one of my comrades had prepared specially for me, but I was sick for days afterwards.

The German advance did not stop until we were near Amiens. The French troops had been reinforced by American regiments. This fact was most depressing. Our troops felt that they had been betrayed by von Tirpitz and by the other war prophets who had said that it would be quite

impossible for the United States to transport troops across the Atlantic successfully.

It was impossible for the Germans, who were worn out after four devastating years of war, and who did not have enough food, to stand up against the well-nourished and perfectly equipped American troops. Before Amiens we soon realised the significance of the fact that the Americans had joined forces with the French. The psychological as well as the physical effects of the first American shells were devastating; our artillery could hardly respond to their onslaught. I saw the huge 21cm. guns, which had been our pride, standing inactive in the road, for we had no ammunition.

On the 6th of March – it was a rainy morning – I stopped in a little wood, a few miles from Amiens, with two comrades and our horses. We had orders to await messages from Brigade Headquarters; we were to transmit these messages to the various regiments. The remainder of our artillery was stationed about a hundred yards behind us. At six in the morning they opened fire – over our heads – against the enemy lines. Not quite half an hour later the Americans concentrated a frantic drum fire on our lines. Their numerous airmen had easily ascertained our position. This day cost the Germans thousands of dead and wounded. Next to me a telephonist, who had been repairing the wires between the observation posts, collapsed suddenly. He was very young, only eighteen, but he did not look more than fifteen. He was seriously

wounded; his leg hung limply from his puttees. The wounded lad cried 'Mother, mother!' incessantly. The shells fell on the ground or struck the trees. Six wounded men, leaning against each other, were coming towards us across the viaduct. A shell burst suddenly in front of them. When I passed the spot later, on which they had stood, there was nothing left of these wounded men but a few fragments of clothes and some tatters of human flesh.

My horse was killed by a splinter from a shell. So much sand and dirt were blown into my eyes that I could hardly see. We tried to take care of the wounded, but one of my comrades – we had served together throughout the entire war – was struck by a shell, which smashed up a part of his spine. He lived for fifteen minutes, although his eyes were glazed. He screamed my name incessantly. A large number of wounded men were dragging themselves along the road near the edge of the wood. A field hospital had been organised near by in a French farmhouse, where there were more than five hundred seriously wounded soldiers and only one surgeon. Soon the supply of bandages was exhausted. On the same day the field hospital was struck by dozens of shells, which killed the doctor and all of the patients. The wounded, who were dragging themselves along the road, met an equally ghastly fate. An artillery company, galloping down the road, were concentrating their efforts on avoiding the American fire, so they took no notice of these wounded

men, many of whom were trampled to death by the horses.

I could not leave my post, as I was waiting for messages. The noise from the machine-guns grew louder and louder. The roar of the explosion of the shells was mingled with the screaming of the wounded, whom no one could help. I nearly went mad, and finally crawled into a shell hole.

I had only one thought: I wished that a shell would strike me, so that nothing would be left of me. I was terribly afraid of being horribly wounded. Anything would be better than lying like that, screaming for hours. I prayed for death with a dreadful intensity. It was my last prayer. After these dreadful hours I had no religious illusions left.

I was obliged to take a message to the regiment. I rode away on my dead comrade's horse and lost myself completely in the enemy fire. A shell fell into the soft field in front of my horse. The horse reared up, fell down backwards, and I landed under the animal. I was knocked senseless by the fall and remained lying on the ground until evening. Finally some soldiers, who happened to be passing, pulled me out from under the horse.

I managed to walk with these soldiers for a short distance, until the attack became so intense that to go on would have been madness. The N.C.O. ordered us to take cover in shell holes. Two of us crawled into one hole, where, hungry and thirsty though we were - it was a damp, cold day - we

waited for the bombardment to cease. Instead it increased. A heavy shell exploded near us and we were buried in earth. Not until there was a slight lull in the bombardment could the reserves, who had just come up the line, dig us out. The German troops were no longer able to put up any resistance; they were forced to retreat. We were relieved by some reserves, while we ourselves were billeted near Verdun for a rest. Later I was ordered to join a machine-gun battalion. I had always avoided army surgeons, because they treated private soldiers so inconsiderately, but now I was forced to consult them. As a result of in-growing toe-nails my toes were so badly affected that I was sent to the regimental infirmary. The army surgeon ordered me to the hospital, where I was to undergo an operation. I asked the hospital surgeon whether my nails were going to be torn out. The surgeon answered, 'That is none of your business, we shall do what we like.' Then seven orderlies stood around me, holding me down, and the surgeon, without chloro-forming me, pulled out all my toe-nails by the roots. I trembled and had an attack of hysterical fear.

After getting leave which I spent with my wife Clara (I had met her a few years before the war and we were married in 1915), I was ordered back to garrison duty. I hated the thought of further friction with my superiors, and on the way back to the garrison I made a pretence of committing suicide. A hospital orderly stationed in the railway station at Leipzig took me to the hospital,

where I struck an assistant surgeon who treated me roughly. In the autumn of 1918 I was dismissed from the army as unfit for service and wounded in action. I received a monthly pension of forty marks.

CHAPTER IV

REVOLUTION

ON the 7th of November I heard from my family that my wife was very ill. I said good-bye, and left Alsace. On my journey, on the 8th and 9th of November, — I travelled *via* Strasburg, Frankfort, Kassell, Halle, Chemnitz and the Vogtland — I saw things I would never have thought possible. The trains were so crowded with soldiers returning from the front that in Frankfort I could only find room on the train by climbing through the window of a lavatory. With two other men I spent almost the entire journey in this tiny compartment. On the journey I began to feel the enormous power of the crowd, which was quite able to march forward and to act without officers. The ultimate aim of the crowd was different from the aim set by their former leaders. So far, however, I was only able to feel all these forces vaguely. I had known nothing of the power of the crowd throughout the three decades of my life, and now I suddenly realised that these men threatened to crush everything that stood in their way. I was not able to think clearly, but I felt that I could not return to my sick wife when events which were so much more important and so much

more universal were about to happen. During the journey words which Georg Schumann, whom I had met during the Russian advance in 1917, and who was the first Socialist I had ever known, had said to me and to my comrades recurred to me.

I learned in Frankfort, and in Kassel and Halle, where our train stopped for a long time, that the German workers and soldiers had followed the Russian example and had organised Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. The things that I heard and experienced at this time were a revelation to me in the truest sense of the word.

On the 9th of November I reached my home in Falkenstein. I enquired at once about the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, but no one in Falkenstein had heard of one. With my own hand I wrote some posters asking the workers and the soldiers who happened to be on leave to meet me that evening. About thirty men, including the Falkenstein leader of the Independent Socialist Party, Storl, came to the meeting. A conflict arose when I told Storl that I had called this meeting in the hope of organising a Workers' and Soldiers' Council in Falkenstein. He declared categorically that it was he who should be the leader if such a Council were to be organised.

Despite his objections the Falkenstein Workers' and Soldiers' Council was organised that evening. Storl and I were elected chairmen. We demanded a room in the Town Hall, so that we would have an office where the Council's business could be transacted. The mayor declared that he would recognise

the Workers' and Soldiers' Council and its decisions, if Storl would arrange to have me expelled.

The next day a few other members of the Council and I journeyed to Leipzig to fetch arms and ammunition from army headquarters, which by this time were entirely controlled by Fleissner Lipinski and other Independent Socialist Party leaders. We finally succeeded in securing a few rifles. When I returned to Falkenstein two days later and delivered the rifles to the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, I found that Storl had already followed the mayor's instructions, and that I had been expelled from the Council.

I therefore tried to work for the revolutionary cause in other ways. The *Leipziger Volkseitung* had organised a printing press in Plauen, and had founded an Independent Socialist newspaper, the *Vogtländische Volkszeitung*. I offered my services to this newspaper. My first job consisted of canvassing for subscribers. I learned a great deal from this house-to-house canvassing in the interests of the movement, which I did not as yet understand very well myself.

During the election campaign for the National Assembly, the Plauen branch of the Independent Socialist Party, of which I had become a member, sent me to the surrounding villages and towns, where I was to organise meetings and assist the local members to form branches of the party. On this tour I helped to found branches in Reichenbach, Netschkau and Mühlau. In Reichenbach, in January

1919, as I was distributing pamphlets for the Independent Socialist Party, I received my first beating from some of the members of the Socialist Party.*

At this time I asked Georg Schumann by letter to speak at a meeting in Falkenstein. I believed that he would have considerable influence on the masses in the Vogtland, and above all I hoped that he would give me an explanation of many things which I could not understand by myself.

Schumann wrote that he would be glad to come, but that he could not speak at an Independent Socialist Party meeting, as he had recently joined the 'Spartacist Union.' He said that he would be glad to speak if I would organise a meeting of the Communist Party.† After considerable difficulty this meeting was organised. The workers in Falkenstein had recognised the innate discord within the Independent Socialist Party as well as the general inadequacy of the party, so that Schumann's speech had a great effect on them. The revolutionary activities of Comrade Steinert, who was working in the Vogtland at this time, were also a powerful influence, and in a few months time the Vogtland was a forcing-ground of Communism. In the spring Paul Popp, Eugen Steinert and I founded the

* During the war the German Socialist Party split into the Majority and Minority Socialists. The former retained the name of German Socialist Party (S.P.D.), the latter was known as the Independent Socialist Party (U.S.P.D.).

† The 'Spartacist Union' (*Spartacusbund*) was founded by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. It afterwards became the German Communist Party.

Falkenstein branch of the German Communist Party. My active interest in Communism had created considerable friction between me and the members of my family and my former friends.

A little later the four or five thousand unemployed in Falkenstein tried to organise themselves so that they could wrest a few vital rights from the reactionary mayor.

The economic situation in Falkenstein was particularly complicated. Before the war business in Falkenstein, a town with a population of 17,000, had been flourishing. The Vogtland embroidery, lace and window-curtain industries were known all over the world, and the demand for these commodities in foreign countries reacted most favourably on labour conditions in our district. As a result the town of Falkenstein grew rapidly before the war. Many new houses and streets were built, and hundreds of embroidery factories sprang up within a few months, like mushrooms.

The outbreak of the World War put a sudden stop to this boom. The male embroidery workers and weavers who were not called up for military service, as well as all the female workers, were thrown suddenly upon the labour market, because the import of raw materials and the export of finished products stopped abruptly. The means of livelihood of thousands of workers had been ruined. The slight industrial activity which might have survived the war was killed by the shortsightedness and narrow-mindedness of Mayor Queck. When the starving

women, whose husbands were at the front, approached the mayor, telling him that conditions in Auerbach, a town only a few miles off, were far better than they were in Falkenstein, Queck would take up his walking stick and threaten to beat the starving women and to throw them downstairs.

The so-called municipal kitchen, where hundreds of women, children and unemployed men received their meagre food, was not far from the room in which I lived. Every day from my window I witnessed the same spectacle. The poor people among the populace knew me because of my brief period of service in the Workers' and Soldiers' Council. I was asked to speak at a meeting of the unemployed. At this meeting I was elected a member of the Council of the Unemployed, and now I was forced – more emotionally than rationally – into actions that were quite outside the normal bourgeois traditions.

This meeting of the unemployed was the first large meeting at which I had ever spoken. At the same time this meeting resulted in the 'illegal' life which I led for years. After this meeting my life consisted of innumerable conflicts which brought me into the closest possible touch with the revolutionary mass movement. When the meeting was over, a long queue of men moved towards the Town Hall, where they considerably disturbed the mayor and the members of the Town Council. I told the mayor that the five thousand unemployed proved the inefficiency of the town's municipal administration.

I also pointed out that the relative mortality in Falkenstein was much higher than it was in other towns of the district. The mayor said, 'I did not know that there was so much suffering.' It was necessary to show him that dozens of children and half-starved women were suffering from frozen toes and feet. For hours or entire days, during the extreme cold, they had been forced to stand in queues waiting for a half-hundredweight of coal dust, or a few pounds of potatoes. In neighbouring towns where the distribution had been more effectively organised conditions were far better. The general bitterness against the mayor, which until now had been restrained, broke out vehemently at this stage. With his own hands that morning he had torn down a poster announcing the unemployment meeting from the Town Hall. The women now unanimously demanded that the mayor should apologise for this action. If he refused they decided that he would have to lead the five thousand unemployed on a march through the town. He refused to apologise, so he was forced to head this march. Two women held him tightly by the arms, so that he could not escape, and for two hours he was thus publicly disgraced in his own town.

As soon as he returned to the Town Hall from this march he telephoned to the Government headquarters in Dresden, and asked the authorities to send soldiers to Falkenstein at once. He told the authorities that Falkenstein was in a state of revolution, and that the masses, incited by the Council of

the Unemployed, were already robbing the citizens. A state of seige was proclaimed in the town, and meetings and demonstrations were forbidden. A warrant was issued against me for a breach of the peace at Plauen. A reward of 2,000 marks* was promised for my arrest.

The following quotation from the *Nürnberg Tageblatt* indicates to what an extent the Press was agitating against Communism:

'In Falkenstein the Spartacists dragged the mayor of the town through the streets for five hours; they dragged him up to the castle rocks and threw him down into the valley.'

Actually, nothing had happened except that the Council of the Unemployed, in a meeting with the municipal council, had gained an increase of the unemployed subsidies and the Falkenstein forest administration had agreed to distribute firewood to the unemployed at relatively low prices.

The mayor successfully arranged to have the militia arrive in the town that same night. Almost all of the members of the Council of the Unemployed were arrested in their beds. They were not able to arrest me – although I was the chairman of the Council – because their spy had bungled things. The mayor and the chief of the militia had ordered a man to ascertain in what room I was sleeping. This spy, however, was so noisy and so awkward that I awoke and grew suspicious.

I left my house quickly and walked up a hill

* £100 in pre-war currency but only about half that sum in 1919.

outside the town boundaries. When the morning dawned I saw a strange picture. Soldiers on patrol duty were marching through the streets. I could faintly hear the shouting of commands. The mayor and his followers had control of the situation.

At eight o'clock in the morning I was informed by two friends – unemployed men – that the entire Council of the Unemployed had been arrested. The soldiers had sworn not to leave the town until I had been arrested as well. The arrested men were taken by car to the Plauen goal; if they had been kept in Falkenstein the mob might have liberated them.

This news caused me to leave my safe position at once. I went back to the town with my two friends. About twenty unemployed gathered round me discussing the shameful assault by the soldiers. I went with three men to the Town Hall at once. The chief of the militia was with the mayor, and most of the soldiers were quartered in the Town Hall. Machine guns were guarding the entrance. The soldiers, who saw me coming, and who had been informed by their spies that I was Hoelz, thought that I had come to give myself up.

I asked to speak to their commanding officer. When he came out I asked him roughly why he had arrested the Council of the Unemployed and what was the meaning of the whole performance. He was slightly embarrassed, and said that he had been informed in Zwickau that the unemployed in Falkenstein were looting and shooting, and that all the shop windows had been demolished. In reply

to my questions the officer was forced to admit that none of these accusations was true. Thereupon I most emphatically told him to leave the town with his soldiers. The officer stuttered that he could hardly do that; he admitted that his presence was quite unnecessary, but he said that he could not leave the town without an order from his superior officer. I turned to face the crowd of unemployed men who had gathered about me as I was talking to the officer, and asked them: 'Do you want the soldiers to remain in the town an hour longer?' They answered unanimously: 'No, tell them to get out at once.' The officer realised that the situation was unfavourable. He asked for two hours in which to leave. This time was not, however, granted to him. The men stormed the steps of the Town Hall, pushing the soldiers away, and threw the rifles and machine-guns on the military lorries standing near the building. The fact that they threw away the rifles shows how harmless these men had remained, despite their bitterness. The soldiers were forced by the mob to climb into the lorries. The expression on their faces showed how glad and relieved they were to leave the town.

After the soldiers had left, the mob of unemployed arrested the mayor. He was forced to telephone to Government headquarters in Dresden and to report on the events of the afternoon in the presence of our guards. We forced him to say that as a reprisal for the arrest of the Council of the Unemployed he and a number of influential citizens were being

imprisoned in the Town Hall, and they would be held as hostages until members of the Council were released. After considerable discussion the Government instructed the Prosecuting Attorney in Plauen to release our men.

After they were let out of prison these men were greeted by an enthusiastic crowd, which had stood waiting in the rain from eight in the morning until six in the evening for their release.

After this there was peace in the town for a few weeks. The Council of the Unemployed co-operated closely with the municipal authorities in the distribution of food and coal.

The Council also made every effort to suppress the illegal profiteering trade in foodstuffs, which had been increasing in the town for some time.

Two members of the Council and two constables inspected the houses of certain factory owners, who were known to have hoarded foodstuffs which they had smuggled into their homes. These foodstuffs were confiscated. On some days huge piles of fat hams, etc., were piled up in the Town Hall. On the following days the Council of the Unemployed would publish an announcement, signed by the municipal authorities, stating that soldiers' widows, invalids, and pregnant women should come to the Town Hall to receive a pound or a half-a-pound of various delicacies. The authorities co-operated with the Council in the distribution of foodstuffs.

One day an old, miserable woman was among the women who came for food. Her son, who was

twenty-six, and for whom she was asking for food, had been suffering from scurvy for a whole year. She was told to come back the next day to receive her quota of food. At the appointed hour she came back to the Town Hall, deeply moved, only to report that it was too late, for her son had died in the morning.

Another time, while we were holding a large meeting in Treuen, an old farm labourer walked up to the speakers' platform and told us his trouble in great embarrassment. He had been employed on a large estate in Pfaffengrün for forty years. His son was employed on the same estate. Their hourly wage was fifty pfennige which amounted to twenty-five pfennige in pre-war values. The old man had asked his employer for a rise; told him that he could neither live nor die on such a wage. The estate owner had said: 'Go to Hoelz, perhaps he will give you something.'

That evening I wrote to the estate owner telling him to give my messenger 10,000 marks at once, so that we could increase the wages of all his men. I wrote that if he disobeyed our orders we would take the horses out of his stables, sell them, and use the money to pay his men. The estate owner sent the money at once.

At a time when potatoes had not been available in Falkenstein for several months, I was told by a motor car driver that in Gruenbach – a town a few miles away from Falkenstein – the municipal authorities were selling potatoes. I did not believe

this report, and went over to Gruenbach to verify it. I went to see the municipal council. I bought two cartloads of potatoes, and was told that, had I come an hour earlier, I could have bought many hundredweights more, which had just been sold to someone else. The man at the Gruenach Town Hall in charge of these sales told me that he had very good business connections, and that he had often offered the mayor of Falkenstein peas, oatmeal, bacon, potatoes, and so on, but that the mayor had always refused his offers.

Acting on my instructions the Falkenstein Municipal Council ordered 1,000,000 marks worth of foodstuffs for distribution in Falkenstein and the neighbouring villages.

As a security for this payment I asked the local capitalists to grant the municipality – which was always financially weak – sufficient credits to meet this debt. The municipality was to sell the foodstuffs at low prices to the population.

The arrival of the Government troops prevented this plan from being realised. Neither the mayor nor the leaders of the Independent Socialist Party, Storl and Pohlmann, approved of close co-operation with me and my friends, for most of the practical results of the joint administration had been brought about by the Communists, and communism was therefore finding many adherents in the town and the surrounding villages.

Storl, Pohlmann, and the mayor had succeeded in making the Social Democrat Government in Dresden

again send troops to Falkenstein. This time the Council of the Unemployed was, without fail, to be dissolved and I was to be arrested. The mayor reiterated that the people would bear their sufferings much more patiently if I were not there to agitate amongst them.

On Tuesday, the 3rd of June, at two o'clock in the morning, a regiment of yeomanry, commanded by Colonel Berger, arrived in Falkenstein and immediately organised house searchings in the homes of many of my comrades.

The house in which I lived was stormed by a hundred men armed with rifles and hand-grenades. The excuse given for this action was a statement that the soldiers had been shot at by someone standing on the roof. Actually no one living in the house owned any firearms, any more than any of the unemployed were armed. Noske's* soldiers shot at the chimney for three or four hours and threw hand-grenades into the garden. The officer shouted: 'The scoundrel has got to be killed, even if we have to destroy the whole house.' I was not in the house, as my excellent 'information service' had warned me in time. I watched the activities of the troops from the Muehlberg.

The soldiers remained in Falkenstein for several weeks, and searched every nook and corner, but I was not found. In the end my enemies conceived the strangest ideas.

* Noske was the Socialist Minister of Defence in the German Republic. He organised the forces that suppressed the Spartacist insurrections. He was hated by the more radical workmen.

One day, on the Ellefelder road, a wedding carriage was held up, and all the occupants were arrested. A guard of fifteen soldiers rushed at the bride, saying that she was Hoelz and the coachman was my 'adjutant' Grüner.

Mistakes of this kind had made the regiments ridiculous in Falkenstein. Little boys in the streets would shout to passing soldiers: 'If you are looking for Hoelz, here he is. I have him hidden in my trousers pocket.'

It would have been intolerable for me, during these strenuous weeks, to remain inactive, except for my efforts to escape the police. I wanted to work for the movement. Therefore, under an assumed name, I spoke at general and at Communist meetings in the surrounding villages. My appearance always turned the laugh against the soldiers, for each time they 'almost caught' me. One day in June I was to attend a party congress in Chemnitz. I was living in Auerbach near Falkenstein. I could not get to Chemnitz except by train. The train, coming from Falkenstein, was sure to be full of soldiers, for a fresh contingent had arrived from Zwickau, and several regiments were leaving Falkenstein. My situation was so difficult that I did not see how I could escape this time.

In Zwickau, where the soldiers left the train, I had to change trains. I stood on the station platform surrounded by soldiers. A number of civilians, who knew me and who had left the train also, were sure that I had been arrested. Only the soldiers, who

had been looking for me for weeks, were quite unconscious that I was standing in their midst. The danger passed, I turned to the left at the auspicious moment, and the soldiers trotted quietly off to the exit.

On the 21st of June, at noon, the last contingent of troops left Falkenstein. By one o'clock I was again standing on the Town Hall steps addressing thousands of unemployed men.

Before withdrawing the troops, however, the commanding officer had taken all precautions. The militiamen, armed with rifles and hand-grenades, marched into the Square and tried to break up the meeting. They even fired some shots, and lined up in defence formation. As a result the workers were so incensed that they attacked the brave militiamen, rounded them up, and took their arms away. The other citizens fled.

A few days later a representative of the Ministry appeared in Falkenstein with General Pilling. They negotiated with the mayor, and later with me. They demanded that the Council of the Unemployed be dissolved at once. They also made other demands which I could not accept. They tried to frighten me by telling me that the Government had decided to send ten regiments to Falkenstein if the council were not dissolved. While these negotiations were going on fresh troops arrived. They surrounded the Town Hall as well as the Square in front of the hall. Martial law was proclaimed, but it was announced that no one was to be hurt. The troops were to be

withdrawn at once if the population did not try to prevent my arrest. Thereupon a detachment of soldiers and an officer, armed with a machine gun, marched over to the steps of the Town Hall, where the Government representative, the general, and I were talking. The officer said that I was under arrest.

The crowd was immediately thrown into a state of tremendous excitement. Great masses of human beings pressed forward towards the Town Hall, and the soldiers were closely wedged in. Any shots fired by the soldiers round the Square would have struck the soldiers standing near the Town Hall. The officer in charge recognised the difficulty of the situation and ordered the troops to withdraw to the Court House. The general and the Government representative as well withdrew to this building.

Then we sent six men to the Court House. Our representatives demanded that the soldiers be withdrawn from the town at once. The general arrested all six men. When this became known the huge crowd turned and stormed the Court House, loudly demanding the release of our representatives and the withdrawal of the troops.

Our comrades were released, but some soldiers suddenly ran across the Square and tried to arrest me. They were so close to me that they almost succeeded, but a few of the workmen tripped up the soldiers while some of the other men took hold of me by the arms and helped me to escape to a hill outside the city.

During the following days and weeks it was quite

impossible for me to return to Falkenstein. The troops had been reinforced, and the town and its surroundings looked like a military camp.

One day two comrades came to my room in Auerbach in great excitement. They told me that I must disappear at once, for spies had informed the authorities where I was living, and consequently Auerbach was to be occupied by a regiment.

That same night I walked from Auerbach to the Czech border with two comrades. I arrived at the frontier early in the morning. My two comrades went back to Auerbach.

The next noon I reached Hof in Bavaria. Here I was told by some workmen that representatives of the Independent Socialist Party from the Ruhr had organised a meeting for that afternoon. They hoped by distorting the facts to persuade unemployed men from Hof to seek work in the Ruhr mining district. I attended the meeting. The speeches I heard caused me to speak myself, and to urge the unemployed to organise. I told them that they could not blackleg in the Ruhr district, and they should only accept the wages fixed by the miners' organisation. I urged them also to insist upon decent housing conditions.

The Independent Socialist, Blumentritt, who was really co-operating with the representatives of capital in the mining district, tried very hard to silence me. Despite his efforts, however, I was able to organise a Council of the Unemployed, which began to function that very day. The next day I had another

escape: while I was speaking at a large open air meeting the following leaflets prepared by the Independent Socialist Party were distributed:

'A BETRAYER OF THE WORKERS HAS BEEN UNMASKED!'

'Yesterday the mass meeting was addressed by a certain Hoelz from Falkenstein, who called himself Müller from Eisenberg. Hoelz is the worst kind of scoundrel. He is paid by the capitalists to travel from town to town stirring up the masses. When he has done this he leaves. Hoelz is not a fugitive; on the contrary he travels from town to town in a motor car. Yesterday evening he disappeared from Hof in a black car. Who gave Hoelz this motor car if he is really a fugitive? As a matter of fact this scoundrel was employed by the capitalist Schnell in Falkenstein to break up the meeting in which the workers were discussing higher wages and better working conditions. After Hoelz had succeeded in dissolving the meeting he used Schnell's car to escape. Men and women, this is the man who comes to you as an agitator, but who then disappears and makes it easier for Noske and his followers to ruin you. He represents the capitalists, by whom he is employed. The Independent Socialist Party is capital's most dangerous opponent, and for this reason Hoelz is ordered to disrupt our meetings.'

As a result of this infamous leaflet I was arrested by the police an hour later, while I was eating my dinner in an inn. Some workers in the inn, to whom I had disclosed my identity, pulled me away from

the police and took me to Oberkotzau, near Hof, along country lanes.

Paul Popp from Falkenstein, and a comrade from Auerbach came to Oberhotzau to fetch me, because, so they said, the soldiers were to leave Falkenstein the next day.

During my absence the Socialist Party and the Independent Socialist Party leaders had agitated against me in Hof. They said that I was a paid agent of the *bourgeoisie*, and so forth. Their lies did not have the desired results, for the elections to the Workers' Council held shortly after the soldiers had left showed the following results : Democrats 167, Majority Socialists 209, Independent Socialists 264, and Communists 1303 votes.

Since my first political appearance – the memorable meeting of the unemployed on 24th of April, 1919 – a warrant for my arrest had been out. By leading a demonstration of the unemployed at a time when such demonstrations were forbidden by martial law I had committed a breach of the peace. The reward for my arrest was constantly increased. The first sum offered was 2,000 marks, but by the time the *Kapp-Putsch* began this sum had been increased to 30,000 marks.

Friends gave me identification papers made out for 'Fritz Sturm' and 'Fritz Werner.' As Comrade Sturm or Werner I spoke as a representative of the Communist Party in Halle, Ammendorf, Helbra, Osendorf, Merseburg, Leunewark, Hettstedt, Mansfeld, Oberröblingen and many other cities in the

centre of Germany. For one week I acted as an agitator and spoke in the Leuna works. When the Majority Socialists and Independent Socialist representatives on the Works Council discovered that I was Hoelz they denounced me to the police. Later, in court, after I had been arrested, it was proved beyond a doubt that it was indeed the Majority and Independent Socialist members of the Leuna Works Council who told the police about me.

A meeting was to have been held in the Leuna works on the day on which the police had been informed of my whereabouts. My friends warned me not to attend the meeting. By this time, having spent several nights in the Leuna works, I understood the political attitude of the workers. I also knew the building so well that I did not think it would be possible to arrest me there. Just as I was walking into the meeting hall at the Leuna works I passed a works policeman and a civilian who pointed at me, but did nothing. The hall filled slowly. As I was standing at the entrance two friends came up to me, suddenly. 'Run!' they said, 'the police are here, and the police van they're going to take you away in is at the door!' At this moment eight policemen appeared. I walked straight into the meeting hall, which was still relatively empty, and sat down on a bench. The comrades and friends who had been standing round me were blocking the entrance. The police, however, pushed them away, and came over to the bench on which I was sitting all alone. One of them told me to follow

him, and said I was arrested. I asked him what he meant, and told him it must be some mistake. He took the warrant out of his pocket, pointed to my picture, and said: 'That's your photograph, come along without a fuss.' I declared that I was Fritz Sturm, and that I did not resemble the photograph in the least. I told him that it might just as well be a picture of himself, and that I refused to be arrested. We argued for quite a time.

In the meantime, the workers were forming a circle round us. The policemen grew impatient. Two of them put their hands on my shoulders and tried to handcuff me. I jumped up quickly, stood on the bench, and called out: 'Workers, will you allow me to be arrested?' A tremendous uproar began. Some of the workmen took hold of both my arms, and rushed me out of the crowd. The other workmen cut off the policemen's sword-belts, and took away their revolvers.

My comrades succeeded in getting me out of the hall very quickly. My feet barely touched the floor as we dashed through the large factory and warehouses which were filled with barrels, faggots, and bottles.

I landed beside the River Saale without really knowing how I got there.

The next day I went to Halle, where I found a hiding place in the home of some friends.

As it was now impossible for me to continue my activities in Central Germany, they now sent me to another district as an agitator. My work during

the last few weeks had shown me that I lacked the theoretical Marxian education which is so essential in any work of this kind. During the first months of my political activity in the Council of the Unemployed, and as a public speaker, there had been little time or opportunity to read, as things moved so quickly, and I was flung from one state of excitement into another.

I was very glad, therefore, to see Comrade Otto Rühle, whom I had met at a meeting in Falkenstein, on the station platform at Halle. He told me that the party had arranged for him to give a Socialist course for workers and students in a town near Hanover. I was planning to go to Hanover in any case, as my wife was living there with my married sister. I attended Rühle's six-weeks course in Socialism at the small town of Walsrode in the Lüneburger Heide.

Before the war I had taken no part in political life, for I had nothing to stimulate my interest in politics. It was the experiences of the war and the November revolution which had caused me to become emotionally interested in political events. My terrible experiences at the front had completely demolished my religious attitude.

After I had finished Rühle's course I visited my family in Ilten, near Hanover. There I was arrested by the local police. I was living in a little cottage in the forest, far away from the village. One morning early two policemen came out and fetched me. They were so anxious to earn the 5,000

marks reward that they at once put a revolver to my head. They would rather have killed me than let me escape. They handcuffed me, and took me to the local prison, in Burgdorf, near Hanover. I was told that in a few days I would be taken to Plauen, where I was to be tried.

I realised that it would not be easy to escape from Plauen. I therefore made a plan of escape at once. I tried to win the prison guards for my plan, but they refused. With the help of my wife I therefore smuggled a letter containing my plan of escape to my friends in the Vogtland.

Punctually to the minute, five daring men arrived in Burgdorf. One of them was a poacher who was well known for his fearlessness. The plan was that towards midnight three of the men were to approach the entrance to the gaol. One of these was to be well dressed. Another was to wear a military cap, and the third, who was to be shabbily dressed, was to be hatless and carry a full rucksack on his back. The man with the rucksack was to pretend to be a tramp; the others were to act the part of constables bringing him in. The two remaining comrades were to hide in the dark and await our signal.

The man with the military cap rang the prison bell at about midnight. When asked what he wanted he said: 'I am constable Müller, and I am bringing you a man we have just arrested.' Two of the warders opened the door a crack to ask what was happening. The two comrades forced open the

door. One of them bound the prison guard, while the other took his keys.

All the evening I had lain on my bunk fully dressed, waiting for a signal. My heart was beating fast when at about nine o'clock I heard a sawing noise underneath my cell window. I was terribly alarmed. I thought for a moment that my comrades had conceived the crazy plan of liberating me in this way. This would have spoilt all my plans. The noise grew louder, and then I realised that it came from the next cell, and that my neighbour was trying to escape. He sawed and sawed with amazing industry. The more he sawed, the less was he disturbed by the noise he was making. I hoped that he would succeed, but I was afraid that he would rouse the night warder, and that my own plans would be frustrated. The man sawed away until almost midnight. Suddenly there was a terrific noise. I heard shouting, doors were thrown open, windows were broken; I heard shots as well.

The door to my cell was opened abruptly. My comrades shouted: 'Max, you are free!' I dashed up to the floor above, and saw that a warder who had freed his arms was shooting wildly with his revolver. We ran out into the street.

We caused a considerable confusion on the road. Courting couples scampered away in fright, and suddenly a great crowd of people were running down the road in front of us. We took a turning to the left, and found ourselves in a large park which belonged to the Burgdorf Castle. We wanted to

run on, but we discovered that the park was surrounded by a deep moat, which was four yards wide. We could not turn back because we were being pursued by an increasing number of people. Some of my companions succeeded in leaping over the moat, but a number of us, including myself, fell into the stagnant water two yards deep.

We were able to get out of the moat after a considerable effort. Then we walked from Burgdorf to Hanover.

I remained in Hanover for two days. Then I went to Halle, where I met Comrades Eugen Steinert and Otto Rühle. The next evening I spoke at a meeting in the Leuna works. The meeting was held in the same hall in which the attempt had been made to arrest me such a short time before. This time the constables did not appear.

I left Halle and returned to the Vogtland, where I changed my hiding place frequently. I spent as much time as I could spare in reading, for Otto Rühle's course had stimulated my interest, and I was anxious to acquire knowledge. It was a great pleasure to fortify my purely emotional attitude towards the revolutionary cause with study.

At this time I often read in the daily newspapers that I had turned up here and there to speak at meetings. It was often reported that I had been arrested. The *Leipziger Neuesten Nachrichten* even announced that I had been shot. Telegrams and letters of condolence were received by my friends,

and wreaths and delegations were sent for my funeral.

One afternoon, despite the warning from my friends, I attended a huge meeting of unemployed where I spoke for over an hour. Suddenly a number of policemen forced their way into the hall to arrest me. Shots were fired, and a panic was inevitable. When the police tried to take hold of me, Comrade Popp struck a chandelier with his walking stick. This produced a short circuit, and the hall was plunged into darkness.

When I was jumping down from the speakers' platform to run out of the hall, several policemen took hold of me. I fell to the floor. They trampled on me and struck at my head with their revolvers. The workmen rescued me, and I escaped from the hall.

Outside the police continued their pursuit. Street fighting resulted, and a number of policemen were wounded. I myself was protected by a large crowd and escaped.

The Communist Party had called a meeting in Falkenstein for the 22nd of October, 1919. I felt no inclination to attend. At about eight o'clock in the evening, long after the meeting had begun, someone brought me the last edition of the *Falkensteiner Anzeiger*. On the front page I saw that a new warrant had been issued for my arrest. The reward had been increased by several thousand marks. This stimulated me to cause a little excitement among the Falkenstein *bourgeoisie*, spies, and police.

I did not have time to tell my friends and comrades about my plan, so I jumped into the hall where the meeting was being held through an open window, facing the garden. My sudden appearance on the speakers' platform made an incredible impression. The women began to weep, because they were sure that I would be arrested this time. It was well known that police reinforcements were guarding the hall. After a short speech I disappeared again through the window.

Shortly after this meeting I walked along through the streets of the city in broad daylight. My friends and comrades had no idea that I had planned this prank. I walked slowly through the streets. The passers-by stopped and stared at me. They thought I was a ghost, or that I was a man who looked something like Hoelz. Then I walked right into the police station in the Town Hall, which was crowded with policemen. I said quite loudly: 'Good morning. Is everything all right?' It was a fantastic moment. The officials were so surprised that they did not move from their places. They returned my greeting, and when I repeated my question loudly, one of them said: 'Yes, everything's all right.' I replied: 'That's good,' turned round, and left the Town Hall. I walked slowly to the Café Meier – which was about a hundred yards from the Town Hall – and sat down at a crowded table. I asked for a cup of coffee, and told the proprietress to hurry up, as otherwise the policemen might drink my coffee. When I left the café a few minutes later, I met Comrade Paul Popp,

who was looking for me. He had heard that I had been arrested as a result of my audacity. Popp was reproaching me for my action when two policemen came up and took hold of me. Popp took out a thick stick from under his coat, which caused the policemen to turn and summon assistance. As they did so we disappeared.

In the evening I was informed that the police were convinced that I would be attending a closed meeting of the Communist Party. The preparations for my arrest were complete, and by nine o'clock in the evening the Hotel zum Falken was surrounded by policemen. The police stormed the little hall where the meeting was being held, and looked for me in all the cupboards and under all the sofas. I was able to observe the activities of the police from a secluded corner outside the church, which was about twenty yards from the meeting place.

Comrade Popp was arrested two weeks later. The police considered him my most important 'adjutant.' The comrades and I resolved to release him. We planned to enter the bedroom of the police officer at night (through his window, by a ladder), and take his keys away from him. While two of the comrades held him, others were to get Comrade Popp out of his cell. Shortly before the day on which we planned to release him, a foreign comrade came to see us, who said that he would free Popp by himself. He called on Popp's wife, who had no decided political views, and said that he had been at the front with Popp. Actually he had never seen

Popp in his life. He made up a story about being interned in England and France, and said that before he had been taken prisoner he had given Popp messages to take back to his family. Now, so this stranger said, he could no longer find his own people, and Paul was the only one who could help him find them. He was wearing an old uniform, which was too short and too tight for him, and he looked so miserable and so undernourished that Frau Popp, naïve as she was, believed him. He heard that she went to the gaol every evening with some bread and coffee for her husband. He asked to go with her, so that he could speak to Paul. At first the police officer would not let him into the gaol, but later he believed him, and Comrade Popp was summoned. Popp and the officer were separated from the foreign comrade and Frau Popp by a heavy iron grating. When Popp stepped out of his cell, the foreign comrade threw up his arms and shouted: 'So this is how we meet again, Paul!' Then the stranger fell down and pretended to faint.

Popp had no idea what it was all about. The police officer wanted to help the stranger, and opened the grating to get at him. At this moment he jumped up, pulled two army revolvers from his trouser pockets, and shouted: 'Let's be off, Paul!' The two disappeared before the police officer had recovered from his shock and his fright. Frau Popp stood there, holding the coffee pot, not realising what had happened.

The police officer had nothing better to do

than to arrest the woman and to lock her up in her husband's cell. Frau Popp was pregnant, and she had left several little children at home. Judge Rietschel, who had frequently shown great brutality, the next day ordered this weak and sickly woman to be handcuffed and transported to the prison in Plauen. The comrade who had released Popp was incensed by this incredible brutality towards an innocent woman who had nothing whatever to do with the affair. He swore that he would shoot Judge Rietschel. If we had not forced him to leave Falkenstein he would surely have done so.

We tried through legal channels to have the woman acquitted. We resolved to use force if she were not out of gaol within five days, but with the help of a lawyer, we secured her release before the time was up.

In the evening two days later a comrade and I took a walk outside the city boundaries. The snow was very deep. A man on skis suddenly darted past us. He had gone about twenty yards when I asked my companion whether that was not Judge Rietschel. I asked the comrade to run after the man and ask him his name. The comrade did so, and called out: 'Aren't you Judge Rietschel?' He answered: 'Yes, I am. What can I do for you?' Then we both leapt at him, threw him down, took off his skis, and beat him until the skis were entirely smashed, and there were only splinters left in our hands. Neither of us spoke at all while we were administering this punishment. Rietschel, who knew quite well why he

was being beaten, whined: 'I can't help it, I can't help it.'

As a result Rietschel spent several weeks in the hospital, and asked to be transferred to another city.

I could only bear the inactivity of my forced hiding for a few months. Then I responded to a request from the Communist Party, and began agitating again in the Vogtland and in Northern Bavaria.

I first spoke at a meeting in the industrial town of Werdau. I called myself Professor Lermontov, and discussed the theme: 'Does Communism give us freedom and bread, or suffering and misery?'

The announcements of this meeting in the local paper did not indicate whether my speech was for or against Communism. The largest hall in the town was filled, partly by workers and partly by influential citizens, including the mayor and several members of the Town Council. I was wearing horn-rimmed spectacles, and spoke for an hour. I did not reveal my identity until the end of the meeting. The citizens, led by the mayor, fled out of the hall, but the police arrived in a few moments. The comrades lifted me from the speakers' platform, and I left the hall by a rope ladder, which was attached to the back of the building. The rope ladder was too short, and I was obliged to jump several yards. My fall resulted in an effusion of blood in the knee, which caused me a great deal of trouble during the next few weeks.

From Werdau I travelled to Selb in Bavaria, where a meeting had been arranged. There was no disturbance, for the Bavarian police were afraid to attack me in such a large crowd. They planned to arrest me after the meeting, and the streets near the hall had been roped off. But I disappeared from the meeting as unnoticed as I had come. The next morning, when I wanted to leave the town, I found that a number of policemen, all dressed in civilian clothes had occupied the station. My knee was so bad that walking was very painful to me. My companion and I had already bought our tickets before we noticed that the policemen were only waiting for me to get into the train, where I would be trapped. I pretended that I was actually going to take the train, but as it was drawing into the station, my companion and I ran across the lines and vanished in a wood near by. But the police had seen us go, and they pursued us from four o'clock in the morning until seven o'clock in the evening. This was on the 19th of March, 1920. The snow was very deep in the wood. The entire neighbourhood had been roused, and it would have been disastrous to use the road for even a few hundred yards. Every time we left the wood, even for a moment, we saw policemen's helmets at the corners of the road. We were being pursued by mounted police as well as by the regular constabulary. The police had planned my arrest efficiently. It would have been impossible for us to escape if the forest had not hidden us from our pursuers.

That evening, when we arrived in Oberkotzau, we were wet, hungry, and exhausted. My knee was badly swollen, and the pain at every step I took was so excruciating that it made me cry out. A comrade in Oberkotzau took us to his home. From him we learned that a '*Putsch*'* had been organised in Berlin, and throughout Germany, by monarchistic officers.

All kinds of wild rumours were going round. It was apparent that something important was happening and that we workers had to be particularly watchful.

I decided to take the train to Hof, where I hoped to hear the latest news. As my companion and I walked down to the station platform, a policeman looked at us sharply, and then disappeared into the station building. We had just got into the train – there were fifteen people in our compartment – when two policemen came in, and ordered me to follow them. I refused. We exchanged heated words, whereupon they left the compartment, only to return in a few moments with several more policemen. They came up to me resolutely, and tried to take hold of me.

In the meantime I had taken out a hand-grenade, which I kept in my pocket. I released the safety catch on this hand-grenade, and quickly held it up, shouting: 'The moment anyone touches me the

* This was the *Kapp-Putsch*. Troops under General Lüttwitz marched on Berlin and occupied the city in March, 1920. The Government fled and a new Government, with Dr. Kapp as Chancellor was put in its place. But the *Putsch* was defeated in a few days by a general strike.

whole carriage will be blown up.' I was ready to do anything however desperate. My words caused an incredible panic. Everyone screamed and rushed towards the door. The policemen were the first to go, though they shouted to the passengers to remain seated. Within a few seconds I was alone in the carriage, even my companion had run away. I used this opportunity to jump out of the carriage and run away from the station. As I was climbing over a garden fence I cut the string attached to the hand-grenade, which I was still holding in my hand, and I had a very narrow escape. Despite the dreadful pain caused by my swollen leg, I dragged myself to Hof, where I heard details of the monarchistic *Putsch* against the Republic.

CHAPTER V

THE KAPP-PUTSCH

THE events which the Communist Party had prophesied for so long, and because of which the party had urged the working class to be particularly on their guard, had now occurred. In the circumstances I could not remain in Hof. Everything in me was urging me to return to the Vogtland, where I could work against the monarchist *Putsch* with my friends and comrades. It was impossible for me to go to Falkenstein by train, because all the stations on the way were guarded by policemen, who would certainly have caught me. Despite my knee, therefore, which was extremely painful, I had to go on foot.

I dragged along for about five hours, but then I collapsed. My foot and leg were swelling steadily. I asked the proprietor of a roadside inn to drive me to Olsnitz in the Vogtland. In the evening, when I arrived, my leg was so bad that I had to be carried from the carriage by the friends who met me. The next day I asked them to take me to Falkenstein, but owing to my condition my friends refused. I succeeded – for a fairly large sum – in persuading the driver of a motor car to take me to Falkenstein.

I arrived in Falkenstein at noon. My first question

was: 'Have you disarmed the regulars?' I knew that Falkenstein was still occupied by regular troops, who had been sent to arrest me. A comrade told me that some of the comrades had been in favour of disarming the regulars, whereas others had opposed it as being too difficult.

The time to act had come. I asked all the comrades to come to a meeting, in which we were to decide how the regulars could be disarmed. Before my message had reached all the comrades, the regulars was ordered to evacuate the city. The troops who had been stationed in Falkenstein had been ordered to assist the regulars in Thuringia, where the fighting between the workmen and the regulars had become severe. When I heard about this I was furious. I cursed inwardly at the thought that my comrades had been so dilatory, and went to the Hotel zum Falken. Outside the hotel I saw several lorries loaded with petrol tanks. These lorries were being guarded by a few regular soldiers. The main body of troops was already marching towards Auerbach.

With the help of six comrades I disarmed the soldiers, and commandeered the lorries with the petrol tanks. In this way we acquired also a few rifles. One of the soldiers escaped, and alarmed the troops marching towards Auerbach. They returned at once, and again occupied Falkenstein. Street fighting between the workers and the soldiers occurred in Castle Square. We succeeded in disarming a few of the soldiers, but we could make no

stand against their superior numbers, and we were forced to retreat and seek a new hiding place.

The soldiers pursued us wildly. I have never run as many miles as I did on this day. During the chase my leg suddenly recovered. When I reached Auerbach, after having escaped from the regulars, I did not have the slightest pain.

I asked a few workmen whom I met in the street what the Auerbach workmen had done to counteract the monarchist *Putsch*. They told me that the Workers' Council had called a meeting in the local institute. I went there at once. As I approached the building I saw that the meeting must be over, for the crowd was already leaving when I shouted: 'Go back to the hall. I have something important to say to the workers.' I was listened to at once.

In a very few moments the huge hall was again crowded with people. I asked all the women to leave. This request caused tremendous excitement, and the women left the hall. I ordered the exits to be guarded, so that no one could possibly get out and inform anyone outside of what was happening. Then I asked the workers to instruct their speakers to tell me what resolutions had been passed. I was informed that a general strike had been planned, and that beyond this the workmen would simply await events. I said that this would not do, that the situation was very serious, and that it would be necessary to act at once. I told them that in other towns the workmen were already fighting the regulars, and that we could not be inactive.

I said that somewhere we must find arms and munitions at once. My remarks were cheered.

I decided to take a big risk, and suggested to my comrades that we march to the police station, disarm the police, and use their arms to attack the regulars in Falkenstein. My suggestion was accepted, and I took care to see that no warning could reach the police station. All my men were instructed to watch their neighbours closely, so that we could be assured that we were not harbouring a spy in our midst.

We were about 2,000 strong when we marched up to the police station. The policemen looked out of the windows without knowing what to make of us. A few of them realised that trouble was brewing. They barricaded the doors, which we forced open with hatchets and axes. There was a slight struggle, in which a few policemen were injured. Many of them gave up their arms without any resistance. Others had to be forced to do so. Apart from a number of rifles we captured many boxes of hand-grenades and several machine-guns. We arrested the policemen and forced them to follow us to a building which we had chosen as our centre of defence.

A few hours later I sent several comrades to Falkenstein in a motor car which I had commandeered. They were to tell the commandant of the regulars in Falkenstein that if he did not hand over his rifles and ammunition to us at once, Falkenstein would be surrounded by workmen from the neighbouring towns.

The commandant's reply to my ultimatum was to arrest my comrades, keep the motor car, and send some more troops to Auerbach to arrest us.

That night the street fighting in Auerbach was quite serious, but apart from the fact that a few were slightly wounded we had no serious casualties. During this attack the regulars shot the tenant-farmer Wanitzki, who had looked out of his window in his night-cap and dressing gown. His wife was wounded.

This surprising attack by Noske's men, who used four large machine-guns and a quantity of hand-grenades and rocket-lights, was warded off on our side by a young twenty-year-old worker who had only one machine-gun. When the attack was over we decided on more stringent precautions. We left Auerbach, and marched towards Falkenstein from various directions. Noske's men had, however, heard about our plans. When we arrived in Falkenstein by car we found that the regulars had already left. The troops had joined another battalion of regulars stationed in the city of Plauen. We were not satisfied with our success, the less so as we heard that throughout Germany and especially in the Ruhr the workers were fighting against the troops commanded by Kapp and Lüttwitz. We regarded the reports that the *Kapp-Putsch* had failed, and that the old Government was again in power, as a piece of bluff meant to pacify the workers. We decided that as long as hundreds of thousands of workers and comrades were waging such a bitter fight

in the Ruhr district, we would support them. We could do this most effectively by disarming the reactionary regular army and the *bourgeois* militia in the Vogtland, and by arming the workers.

We opened recruiting stations for the Red Army in the Vogtland. We armed the workers who came to us from all parts of Germany in order to take part in the revolutionary struggle. To raise money for the care of our Red Guard we posted announcements telling the local capitalists and war-profiteers to appear on a certain day at a certain place. When the time came I went to the meeting place unarmed, with a comrade, and asked the capitalists – about sixty had come – whether they would be willing to supply 45,000 marks a week for the financing of the Red troops. They asked for a few moments in which to talk it over. I left the room with my companion.

When I returned they said that they would be willing to supply the desired sum. They expressed the wish that the Red Guard would maintain order and prevent pillaging, in view of the fact that the police had been disarmed by the workers. It was to our own interests to accede to this wish. We could not permit any destructive elements to give the revolutionary cause a bad name.

When the house of a factory owner named Zöbisch had been searched in Plauen, a young Red soldier had given way to temptation, and had stolen some jewellery which was on the table. The factory owner reported this theft to the Red Guard headquarters.

I investigated the affair thoroughly. Finally a young working woman reported that a Red Guard had given her a ring. This led to the discovery of the thief. The jewellery was returned to the factory owner, so that the workers' cause would not be discredited, and the young soldier was arrested.

Another time one of our men, who had come to us from another town, and who led one of our groups, stole some silver coins from the man in whose house he was billeted. When I arrived in Klingenthal, near the Czechoslovakian border, a man pushed his way through the crowd to where I stood, and told me that a Red soldier had stolen all his savings, which amounted to about 15,000 marks. The man reported that while our troops were marching through his town, they were given coffee and other refreshments by the inhabitants. He said that he, too, had shown our troops hospitality, and that while he was doing so one of our men must have stolen the money.

I ordered all the Red soldiers, including the company commanders, to be searched, but no trace of this money was found. I was very depressed by the failure of this search, and began to believe that the man had been bluffing in order to get compensation out of me.

That same night I searched the guards who were being sent out to stand in the fields. I found that one of the responsible leaders was missing. I was greatly surprised, and when I asked where he was I was told that he had been missing for several hours.

Finally, after searching for an hour, I found him in an inn. He was very drunk, despite the strict rule of abstinence in force among the Red troops. I became suspicious, and thought that this unscrupulous man might well have stolen the money. I searched his pockets and the lining of his coat. We found a number of silver coins, and he confessed in the end that he had stolen the money. He said that he had hidden the rest of it in the forest. I was so upset by this misdemeanour that I punished the soldier then and there. I struck him with his own rifle until he fell down. I was afraid that I might have killed him. My companions carried him into a near-by police station. The next morning he reported to me. He was completely sober, and he asked my forgiveness with tears, and begged to be taken back into the Red Guard. This, of course, I could not do. The man who had been robbed was compensated in full. These are the only cases about which I heard of revolutionary soldiers who forgot what they owed to the cause of their class. The Red army grew daily, so that more money for its upkeep became necessary. Without any undue pressure from us, the Plauen capitalists increased their weekly contribution to 100,000 marks.

The towns near Markneukirchen asked for our support. They feared that they might be attacked by the Markneukirchen Citizen Guard. To avoid this possibility we attacked Markneukirchen with armed workers from Olsnitz, Adorf, and other towns. While we were marching towards the town I sent a

representative on ahead to tell the mayor that if he did not surrender his arms within ten minutes we should open fire. The mayor said that the Markneukirchen Citizen Guard was prepared to surrender. In the meantime, however, some street fighting had begun between our troops and the Citizen Guard, and one looker-on was killed by a stray bullet.

Our motor cars could not approach the Town Hall, for the members of the Citizen Guard, who had been through four years of active warfare, had dug regular trenches, and had prepared for a big battle.

We soon defeated the citizen heroes. I handed shovels to the mayor, the two ministers of the gospel, the leader of the Citizen Guard, first-lieutenant Scholtz, and to a few other prominent citizens. They were ordered to fill in the trenches under my supervision. As security for the arms which were still to be delivered to us, the rich factory owners in the town were forced to give us 100,000 marks at once.

As a result of the events in the spring and summer of 1919, twenty-four workmen from Falkenstein had been in the Plauen County Gaol for nine months, awaiting their trial. It had been decided during the *Kapp-Putsch* that they were to be tried by the Noske men. The Falkenstein workers were hoping that their comrades in Plauen would release these comrades. The days passed, and this had not happened, so I decided to liberate them by force. In the middle of the night I marched into Plauen,

a city of 130,000 inhabitants, with five men and three machine guns. A larger force would have been too conspicuous. I could only succeed if the attack was so sudden that the regulars, the militia, and the police were given no time to think.

As the officials refused to open the doors of the gaol, we were obliged to force them open. Within the prison we were cut off from the cells by a high and wide iron door, which resisted our axes. It was necessary for us to act quickly before the regulars and the police had been alarmed. We stood very closely together in double rows, and pressed rhythmically against the iron door until it finally crashed down. Luckily none of us was hurt.

The prisoners in the cells, who realised that their hour of freedom had come, began a terrible uproar. They called, shouted, sang and whistled, so that we could not hear a word that was said. Then the night-watchmen who had lain low until now, joined us. They were trembling and white. They had not thought it possible that we could smash such a huge door. They thought that their last hour had come, for many of them had treated our comrades very badly.

I asked for the list of political prisoners, and commanded them to unlock the cells of these twenty-four men at once. 'We are taking our comrades to Falkenstein,' I said. This command was promptly obeyed. This day on which we could restore our comrades, who had suffered so much during the

nine months of detention, to freedom, and to their families, was the happiest day of my life.

There was no time for a glad reunion. The machine-guns were reloaded on the motor cars, and we prepared to leave.

I almost forgot to attend to an important matter. I had been informed that a number of my comrades had been arrested merely because of certain denunciations. I was anxious to learn who the betrayers were. I asked a prison official to give me the documents concerning my twenty-four comrades, but he told me that they were in the hands of the prosecution. The attorney, whose house was near the prison, had undoubtedly heard the noise, but he had not come out. Accompanied by a few comrades I knocked at his door. In a little while a window above was opened slowly, a head covered with a night cap appeared, and an anxious voice asked: 'What do you want?' I said: 'Are you the attorney?' 'Yes, I am.' 'Well, then, come down at once.' He said that he could not come down at once, that he had to get dressed first. 'If you do not come down within two minutes, I shall burst open the door with a hand-grenade.' To show him that I meant what I said I tied two hand-grenades to the door knob.

Before two minutes had elapsed the attorney came down trembling, and said that he would hand over the papers to me.

I accompanied him to the court, where the papers were kept. He handed me a few packages, but I

noticed at once that some were missing. The most important papers were not among those he gave me. I said: 'We have no time to stay here much longer. Your life will be my security for these documents. I shall take you to Falkenstein as a hostage, and if all the documents are not handed over to me by this evening I shall have you shot.'

He could do nothing but obey. I took him in my own motor car, where he was safe. This precaution was necessary for as I was leaving the cells I heard four of my liberated comrades arguing violently as to which of them should take vengeance on the chief warder, who had treated them very badly. I knew how much my friends had suffered, and I understood their bitterness, but we had no time to settle accounts with the men who had maltreated them.

The town began to grow lively; the news of our deeds had spread. We had left Plauen far behind, however, before the police were on our tracks.

We entered Falkenstein amidst loud cheering.

I saw that the attorney was given lunch in the best hotel. He certainly could not complain about the way we treated him. I suggested that he sit down and write to his wife; the letter was to be transmitted by a motor cyclist. I made him write that he would be shot if the missing documents did not arrive by noon.

Before twelve o'clock his wife, accompanied by an official from the district court, arrived with the documents.

When the attorney realised that, despite his abuse of my innocent comrades, he himself was going to get off unmolested, he grew very arrogant, and demanded a motor car to take him and his wife, as well as the official, back to Plauen. I damped his hopes by telling him that he could drive back in a carriage which I would requisition from a Falkenstein industrialist. I told him also that for this privilege he would be made to pay 1,000 marks to the war widows' and orphans' fund.

I learned from the documents that two men who had become members of the party were actually police spies. I had them arrested at once.

That afternoon a few comrades and I went to the Falkenstein Court, where I called together all the officials. I told them that the workers now controlled the Government, and the law. I declared that we no longer needed *bourgeois* laws, which were created only to oppress the workers. Henceforth we workers would draft our own laws.

I ordered the officials to carry all the legal documents out of the court, and to pile them up on the large square between the court buildings and the school.

The magistrate thought I was joking. When he realised that I was serious he wept and began to implore me to change my mind, for his whole life and work were centred in these documents. He said that he had grown up respecting these laws, and that I should try to see his point of view. I told him that I could not take his feelings into consideration, that

I was concerned with events which were more important than personal sentiment. I told him that my action was only a tiny link in the chain of the workers' great fight for liberty.

The magistrate could do nothing except help us carry the documents out to the square. The officials worked for hours under my supervision. When the last bundle of documents and the last book – with the exception of the documents concerning the guardianship of children – had been piled up, I handed each of the officials a box of matches, and the bonfire was lit simultaneously at four corners.

The fire burned steadily for three days and three nights.

The efforts of our recruiting stations were successful; the number of workers, coming from all parts of the Germany, who wanted to join the Red army in the Vogtland, increased daily. Soon we were short of rifles, and it was my immediate task to try to acquire another supply of arms and ammunition. I was informed by some comrades that huge supplies of arms and munitions of all kinds were being kept in the garrison at Frankenburg near Chemnitz. These arms, which belonged to the regular troops, were being guarded by a captain and fifty men. I was told that these arms had been offered to the Chemnitz Workers' Council several times, but that the council's committee had not accepted the offer, even though it was so necessary for the workers to be armed.

I decided to get these arms from Frankenburg. To reach Frankenburg we were obliged to travel by way of Zwickau and Chemnitz. I chose thirty reliable comrades to join me on this expedition. None of them carried rifles or revolvers, and only a few of them had taken hand-grenades in their pockets.

When we changed trains in Zwickau we created a considerable sensation. The Zwickau Workers' Council, consisting of Independent Socialist Party men, was in a panic. When we did not leave the train at Zwickau, as they had feared we would, they telephoned to Chemnitz that the ill-famed Hoelz and his comrades were planning to arrest the Chemnitz Workers' Council. In Chemnitz we changed to the Frankenburg train. On the Chemnitz station platform we were surrounded suddenly by a few hundred policemen, who wanted to earn the 30,000 marks, for the day before the Saxony Government had increased the reward for my arrest to this sum.

I was speechless with surprise at this reception, because the Chemnitz Workers' Council, who controlled the city, included as many Communists as it did right-wing Socialists. My fellow member in the Communist Party, Heinrich Brandler, was one of the leaders in the council. I could not understand therefore why the Chemnitz police dared to take this stand against us. The policemen approached to arrest me, but as they were closing in upon us I shouted 'Take out your hand-grenades!' The effect of my words was immediate. The policemen ran

away as soon as they saw three or four hand-grenades. We thought that all obstacles had now been removed, and that we could travel to Frankenburg without further trouble. When we were walking towards the platform from which our train was to leave, however, we were surrounded by another gang of policemen. I asked one of the police sergeants what they wanted. Whereupon – either to quiet me or to arrest me – he put his hand on my shoulder. I knocked him down – he fell on the railway lines. I took his revolver and shot into the air a few times, whereupon these policemen, too, ran away. I did not want to increase the excitement in Chemnitz, so I decided not to wait for the train. We walked towards Frankenburg in single file along the railway lines. When we had been walking for about fifteen minutes we heard wild shooting behind us. About half a mile away from us hundreds of policemen and members of the Chemnitz Citizen Guard were trying to surround us. Despite the fact that they were all well-armed, they were apparently afraid to come any nearer. Shortly before we reached Frankenburg they shot at us from ahead as well.

We learned later that the villages round Chemnitz had been warned by telephone that Hoelz and his followers were trying to liberate the Russian prisoners of war who were still interned near Frankenburg. Despite all the difficulties we reached Frankenburg safely, where we were warmly welcomed by the Executive Committee of the Workers' Council.

The chairman of the council went out to meet the Chemnitz police and Citizen Guard, and told them that my friends and I were under the protection of the Frankenburg workers. He told the people from Chemnitz that if they dared to follow me into Frankenburg they would be opposed by all the workers in the town. The men from Chemnitz were surprised when they heard this, for they had expected that the Frankenburg Workers' Council would be just as antagonistic towards me as the Chemnitz council had been. They returned to Chemnitz disappointed.

An hour later Brandler came to Frankenburg by motor car, and asked me to come with him to Chemnitz, to explain my plans to the Chemnitz Workers Council. Shortly before we reached Chemnitz Brandler asked me not to say that I had come to Frankenburg to fetch arms and ammunition. Instead he asked me to state that I had come to buy clothes and shoes. This request seemed very strange.

In our conversation Brandler assured me that he approved of my activities in the Vogtland, and that he was glad that we had made such progress in Falkenstein. He offered to come to Falkenstein to develop our Press campaign.

In Chemnitz I witnessed an example of the local council's 'revolutionary energy.' The council's executive committee had not even tried to prevent the 'reception' given to me by the police. The Chemnitz council was, in fact, somewhat disturbed

by the revolutionary activities of the workers in the Vogtland. While we acted, the Communist and Socialist members in Chemnitz were merely discussing what to do.

The workers in the Ruhr were waging open warfare against the military dictatorship of Kapp and Lüttwitz. More than that, they were fighting for the control of the whole district.

The workers' attitude in many industrial districts was more revolutionary. The pressure from the masses was so great that even local Social-Democratic organisations were forced to consider the revolutionary demands of the workers.

The Social-Democratic administration in Niederrhein, for instance, approved of a pamphlet in which 'political control was to be based on the dictatorship of the proletariat,' and 'the victory of Socialism was to be based on the organisation of workers' councils.' The Chemnitz Socialist Party issued a pamphlet demanding that the dictatorship of the proletariat should replace the dictatorship of the military system.

The leaders of the Socialist Party did not, of course, seriously approve of these revolutionary ideas, but the fact that such demands were made reflected the revolutionary attitude of the masses. The activities carried on by the workers in the Vogtland under my leadership were a concrete expression of the desires of the masses. Another reason why it was our duty to act as we did was the fact that by doing so we gave support to the workers in the Ruhr.

It is now quite clear that during the period of the *Kapp-Putsch* the most essential factor which might have brought about the ultimate victory of the revolution in Germany, was lacking: a clear-sighted, well-disciplined Communist Party, which would have acted along firm revolutionary lines, did not exist in Germany. Our influence in the Vogtland, too, was diminished because we over-estimated the amount that can be achieved by one leader. Actually, of course, a well organised party is far more important. A revolutionary party cannot lead the masses unless the party itself is well organised and inwardly consolidated.

CHAPTER VI

F L I G H T

AFTER the revolutionary movement had been strangled in the Ruhr, the Government tried to suppress our activities in the Vogtland. The Vogtland was surrounded by 50,000 regular troops armed to the teeth in the most modern style. I had no intention of waging a regular warfare against this overpowering majority.

Before the regular troops had come near enough to attack us we left our 'fortress' in Falkenstein and retreated to Klingenthal, near the Czechoslovak border. I wanted to prevent a disorganised breaking-up of the revolutionary troops, and it seemed wiser to be interned in Czechoslovakia than to be taken prisoner by the regulars. To warn the Government and to frighten the regulars we posted up placards before we left Falkenstein, announcing that if the regulars occupied the town we would burn down the houses belonging to the capitalists. Actually we had no intention of carrying out this plan. Our object in posting these placards was merely to terrorise the capitalists, so that they would urge the regulars to retreat. We did not fully succeed, and it was against our orders

that a few comrades set fire to a number of houses before we left.

The Red soldiers were stationed in Klingenthal and the surrounding towns. The Czechoslovak authorities had been informed that we planned to enter Czechoslovakia. As a result some Czech troops were sent to the frontier. I negotiated with Czechoslovak officers concerning the possibility of an orderly march into Czechoslovakia. We also discussed the possibility of our being interned there.

The next day some minor encounters took place between our advance guard and detachments of regulars. When I realised that we were being hopelessly surrounded I ordered some bridges and roads to be blown up, so that the regulars would not be able to prevent our crossing the frontier at the last moment.

On a rainy night in April I called back the advance guards and addressed the Red troops, on the Klingenthal-Georgenthal road. I described the situation to my comrades in arms. We were completely surrounded, and there were only two courses of action open to us: we could march across the frontier in close formation, where we would be interned by the Czechoslovak Government, or we could break up and try to get across the frontier or through the lines of the regulars individually or in small groups. The comrades decided on the latter course, as further resistance was unthinkable, and we wanted to rob the regulars of any excuse for carrying out a massacre.

I myself went back to Klingenthal with one comrade. I wanted to make sure that none of our soldiers had been left in the town, and I wanted to ascertain, above all, whether any of our arms or ammunition had been forgotten. We almost ran straight into a patrol of regulars, but we escaped to the hills near Untersachsenberg. At dawn we found a hiding place in a little cottage belonging to a musical instrument maker. His wife was just handing us a cup of coffee when a grown-up son rushed into the room all at once and shouted: 'The regulars are coming!' He took us up to a loft above the goat stable, and hid us in a load of hay.

We heard commands being shouted by the leader of the patrol which was surrounding the house. Some of the soldiers then began to search every room. About four soldiers poked the hay with their bayonets. My thigh was wounded, and I almost cried out, because I was afraid that they might strike my companion's or my own eyes. They left the loft just as I was about to cry out. We heard the leader of the patrol mustering his men. Then they left to search the neighbouring house. In a little while we crept out of our hiding place and looked out of a little window in the roof. We saw the patrol beating some of our comrades, whom they had found in the house, with the butt-ends of their rifles. It was terrible to witness this maltreatment of our comrades when we could do nothing to help them. We ourselves never treated our enemies so brutally.

We found it difficult to remain in our hiding place.

I suggested to my companion that we leave at once, as the regular troops would probably return. He refused; he thought we would be safest where we were, and that they would not search in the hay loft again. I insisted on going, and told him that if he would not join me I would go alone. He came unwillingly.

The house was only about ten yards from the Czech frontier. We escaped to an estate across the border. Luckily the Czech frontier guard had not seen us. From the roof of a farmhouse we watched the Czech regulars bringing our comrades out of houses which were situated on the Czech side of the border. The Czechs turned our comrades over to the German regulars, who maltreated them while the Czechs watched with enjoyment. The musical instrument maker, his wife, and his son, were treated very badly as well. I had not been mistaken. In about half an hour the regular soldiers returned to their house. This time they examined the hay so thoroughly that they threw it all on to the road. The poor woman was so frightened by the officers that she confessed that we had been there, but had left again, whereupon the whole family was arrested, beaten, and conducted to Klingenthal.

My companion and I left the house near the frontier quickly. We walked through a Czech forest until evening, when we were very tired and

exhausted, as we had eaten nothing all day. In a small village we tried to find some place to sleep. It was cold and rainy, and it would have been impossible to sleep out of doors. Our feet refused to go on. We tried to get into a lonely barn, but the door was locked. Despite the fact that we tore our clothes we crawled into the barn through a narrow opening. There was only a little hay, but we covered ourselves up with it and lay close together to keep warm. Our clothes were wet through, and our teeth were chattering.

As soon as the day dawned we left this uncomfortable place and wandered on aimlessly, hoping to leave the frontier far behind. At noon we arrived back at the same place from which we had started in the morning. We then walked along the road, hoping to find a railway station from which we could leave for Eger. We met a number of Czech regiments including some artillery. They were resting near a brook. When we asked them whether they were joining the manœuvres they said 'No' – they were going to Graslitz, near the frontier, for they had been ordered to prevent Hoelz and his companions from marching into Czechoslovakia.

We reached Eger safely, and then took a train in the direction of Pilsen. We left the train a few stations before it reached Pilsen. We wanted to spend the night in the village inn, but we noticed two or three policemen in the bar-room, and tried to find lodgings, therefore, in a private house. The owners of the house, who knew from our speech

that we came from the other side of the border, were afraid to take us in. As we were leaving the house we saw about fifteen civilians and a number of policemen, who had followed us because they had been informed that we were Red soldiers.

I closed the gate quickly. My companion and I hurried into the yard and climbed up a ladder to the top of the wall. We jumped down and escaped to the grounds of a neighbouring farmhouse. As we stood on the top rungs of the ladder some of our pursuers already stood on the lower ones. The others had got into the neighbouring farmyard through the gate, and were waiting to receive us. I again climbed on to the wall, and fell into a cesspool of liquid manure, which was about a yard deep. Before I could get up, my comrade, who had escaped from the clutches of a policeman, jumped down on to my back. Despite all these difficulties, we jumped over a fence and reached a large field outside the village. A river had overflowed, and the water in this field was several inches deep. Our pursuers were now about thirty yards behind us. As far as I can remember there was no shooting. It was just growing dark, and this was a great help to us. We waded through a small stream and reached some railway lines. We heard the shouts of our pursuers and the barking of dogs behind us.

We marched along the railway lines for seven hours. The night was bitterly cold and our clothing was wet and filthy. My comrade had lost his coat and hat. We were afraid to go into any house, but

at four o'clock in the morning we took the first train that left a little station. In Marienbad at seven o'clock in the morning a police patrol searched every compartment in the train. Two policemen examined us carefully, then they scrutinised the luggage rack, as though they hoped to find my comrade's hat in it. Then they said: 'Come out with us.' They did not reply to our indignant protests. We learned later that our whereabouts had been telephoned and telegraphed to Marienbad.

The patrol conducted us through the city to the police-station. On the way I tried to throw away a hand-grenade which I had in my pocket without anyone seeing me do so. But I did not succeed. When we arrived at the police station we were forced to give up our identification papers (which were, of course, made out in assumed names). We were told that we must wait until an answer to a wire had arrived. We were given coffee and were permitted to sit down comfortably at the table at which the policemen were writing their reports. Rifles, swords, and guns were hanging on the wall. The house, which consisted of three stories, was really the police barracks.

The police officer suddenly looked up from his desk and asked us if we were armed. We said that we were not. He told us that it was his duty to search us. First my companion was searched, and nothing was found. Then they came over to me. Two policemen felt over my pockets, while the police officer stood watching them.

In the meantime I had taken the small hand-grenade out of my pocket, and was holding it in my closed hand, so that the policemen found nothing in my pockets. The police officer – he was small and plump – however, asked me to open my hands. I held my arms outstretched and opened my hands so that the little black hand-grenade was visible on my left palm. The little uniformed official at once cried out hysterically: ‘A bomb! A bomb!’ He turned more quickly than I would have thought possible, and dashed into the next room followed by the four policemen.

I remained standing with my arms outstretched, as though I had been hypnotised. My comrade and I looked at each other without speaking. I was so surprised that for the moment I did not even grasp the humour of the situation. Then I walked slowly into the next room and out into the passage. My comrade followed me at a distance of a few feet. The building seemed deserted. We descended the staircase slowly, and walked out into the street, and I began to hope that the coast was clear. We had proceeded only a few feet, however, when the windows in the police station were opened suddenly. In all of them police helmets appeared. The men shouted: ‘Stop him! Stop him!’ pointing at me. A policeman approached me from the other side of the road, and called ‘Don’t move!’ I answered: ‘Come with me!’

The policemen, in the meantime, had again plucked up their courage. In an instant fourteen of

them were standing in the street, aiming their rifles at me. They shouted: 'Put down your hand-grenade!' at least fifty times. As I had not the slightest intention of making use of the hand-grenade in Czechoslovakia I placed it near a tree on the pavement. Then when I had walked a few yards away from the hand-grenade the policemen pounced upon me. The plump little man was now very brave. He would have liked to shoot me, but meanwhile he struck at me from all sides. For me, however, the tension had relaxed, and I began to laugh heartily.

We were handcuffed and transported to Eger. My hearing took place two days later, and I was confronted by two German regular officers and a Dresden magistrate, who addressed me as 'that man Hoelz.' They were convinced that I should be handed over, and the Czechoslovak authorities in Eger were indeed willing to turn me over to the German officers and the magistrate at once. I was ready to leave when at the last moment the Government in Prague intervened, saying that I was not to be surrendered.

A few days later six of us – four other Red soldiers had been arrested in Eger – were taken to Prague in a special train, which consisted only of an engine and two carriages. The six of us, accompanied by twelve policemen, travelled in one of the cars, while the second carried thirty more policemen.

In Prague our train was held in the station for a

whole day while it was being decided what should be done with us. It was my impression that the chief desire of the authorities in Prague was to exhibit us there.

From Prague we were transported by train to Jitschin, from where we were marched to the prison at Karthaus. There I was accused of carrying hand-grenades. We were interned at Karthaus for four months. We were guarded by legionaries with fixed bayonets. Out of doors it was very hot, for it was May and June, but in the cells it was so cold that I kept on my overcoat day and night. We almost wept with cold and hunger. It was so strangely and terribly cold because the prison walls – it had once been a monastery – were two yards thick. The cells were never heated, and the walls were still permeated with the winter frosts.

The food was not bad, but there was not enough of it to nourish us sufficiently. At first we were unable to get extra food. Later the organised workers in Jitschin took care of us. During the last two months we were quite well provided for.

It was necessary to get into touch with an attorney who spoke Czech, so that he could negotiate for us with the government in Prague. A merchant named Goliath, who was a Social-Democratic member of the municipal council, recommended a Socialist lawyer in Jitschin, named Dr. Abl. He told me that he was prepared to defend me and the twenty-three other men who were interned in the prison. The first time he came to see me he asked me who would

pay for this defence, which would probably be very expensive. I promised to communicate with the German Communist Party, asking them to send him some money.

Shortly before the Red troops had been dissolved, the Falkenstein Executive Committee, of which I was a member, had distributed sums of money ranging from 50,000 to 200,000 marks (which we had received from the Vogtland capitalists) in a number of hiding places. We wanted to prevent the regulars from getting this money. The total sum was about 750,000 marks.

Nine hundred convicts, all of them Czechs, were imprisoned at Karthaus when we were there. We twenty-four Red soldiers from the Vogtland were awaiting deportation to Germany. All day long we heard the clanking of chains in the courtyard, for the prisoners were manacled. Many of them were forced to drag about more than half a hundred-weight of chains, even though they had to do heavy work.

I tried to press a quick settlement of my case, for the fate of others depended upon my own. When I began to feel that my case was being indefinitely postponed I went on hunger-strike for fourteen days, when the date of the trial was finally fixed. My condition after five days of this hunger-strike was very bad. I was feverish, and my intestines burned like fire. To prevent forcible feeding I had wedged the cell door with nails from within, so that it could not be opened. To open the door axes would have

been needed. I had, however, told the prison authorities that I would set fire to the straw mattress in the cell as soon as I heard the first stroke of the axe against the door. Had this been necessary I should undoubtedly have burned to death. A week before, the prisoner in the cell above me had committed suicide by setting fire to his straw mattress. For this reason the authorities did not force open the door, but planned something else. I was informed that the prison officials were going to break open the door at night when I was fast asleep. I took precautions against this plan by hanging a tin wash-basin as well as my tin food dish over the door. Then I moved my mattress so that my head lay against the door, right under the tin dishes. This alarm apparatus functioned beautifully. The slightest movement against the door caused all the tins to fall down and awaken me. I also told the authorities that if they opened the door by force they would split my skull with their axes at the same time. The situation was tragical-comical. The Czechoslovaks had locked me in, but I in turn had locked them out. I was so thirsty that I suffered untold agony. They were quite willing to give me water, but I refused it.

Apart from causing the date of the trial to be fixed, my hunger-strike resulted in another success. I received conclusive proof of the fact that it was Dr. Abl, my lawyer, and not the Czech authorities, who had been postponing the trial. I therefore telegraphed to a German lawyer, asking him to come and see me. When he came I showed him the

large bill which Dr. Abl had presented to me. It appeared that in a few weeks the Czech lawyer had spent more than 60,000 marks, which my friends and comrades had sent to him. In return Abl had done nothing at all. My German lawyer handed this bill to the Socialist headquarters in Prague. The Czech lawyer's exorbitant bill was published, even though he was a member of the Socialist Party. The Czech Lawyers' Association took the matter up, and decided that Abl should no longer be permitted to practise law. Dr. Abl was so mortified by this affair that he hanged himself in his bedroom. Thereafter my German lawyer and a barrister in Prague co-operated in my defence, and my affairs progressed satisfactorily.

One thing stands out among my memories of these days at Karthaus. As I lay on my straw mattress in my cell during the long summer nights I often heard women and girls singing Czech folk songs, which were extraordinarily beautiful. I have never heard anything like it, either in Germany, England, or any other country. Later I went to operas in Vienna and Berlin, but they were not comparable with this lovely singing which I heard on those wonderful nights that were heavy with the fragrance of the limes.

My comrade and I were discharged from the Karthaus prison in August. The other twenty-two comrades had been dismissed and deported from Czechoslovakia a few weeks before.

After we had been discharged, my comrade and I

were forced to submit to supervision by two Prague plain-clothes men. About a week before I was dismissed from prison I was tried in the Jitschin County Court because of the hand-grenade. I was sentenced to several weeks solitary confinement, but this sentence was passed only as a matter of form, for a short time later I was released from the prison.

I was still very weak from the hunger-strike, so my lawyer sent me to a nursing home near Prague. When we were leaving Jitschin the local workers' organisation gave us a festive send-off. They brought large bouquets of flowers, red ribbons, and fiery carnations.

By way of protest against this send-off the Czech Nationalists organised a counter-demonstration in the station building, but they were forced to abandon it very soon, because the Socialists in Jitschin were in the majority, and the Socialist mayor himself had taken the part of my friends.

The Czech Nationalists avenged themselves for these attentions by telephoning to all the towns through which we had to pass, so that their adherents could come to the stations and molest us.

When we reached the first station hundreds of Czech Nationalists lay down on the railway lines, so that the train could not proceed. They thus forced us to leave the train, and threatened me with obscene language, saying that they would throw stones at me and kill me.

The plain-clothes men who were accompanying

us, and our lawyer, telephoned at once to the Ministry of Justice and the Chief of Police in Prague to report this incident. As a result a motor car was sent out to us at once. We drove to Prague and reached the sanatorium by one o'clock that night. When we got into the motor car the frantic Nationalists spat at us and threw apples and pears at our heads.

In the sanatorium, which was in a suburb of Prague, one surprise followed another. Two plain-clothes men had been sent out to watch us, and I was obliged to pay for their board and lodging. I could not afford such a heavy outlay, for the funds which I had received from the Vogtland could not be used to pay expenses of this kind.

We were not allowed to leave the sanatorium grounds alone. The only exercise we were supposed to have was walking in the garden under the supervision of the detectives. Whenever we managed to leave the sanatorium we were supervised in the following manner: one of the plain-clothes men – they took turns in watching us – who played the violin very well, walked ahead of us playing his violin and singing lovely Czech folk songs. We would walk around for hours, and he would try to find shops where we could buy goats' milk.

The other plain-clothes man was not so pleasant. He was small and fat. He said that he had been a valet of Count Thurn and Taxis. He had been a detective only since the fall of the old régime. This man continually asked me for money. He told me

the most moving tales about his poverty – unless I bought his gold watch at once he would be obliged, that very night, to shoot his wife and his lovely baby. He asked 50,000 crowns for his watch, but I could not afford even fifty. At any rate, he seemed to consider me a millionaire. On his way to Prague he had been told by peasants who had seen our train at some country station that my trunks were filled with jewels.

The Czech Nationalists, who soon heard of my presence, showered attentions on me many evenings when we were sitting on the terrace, by causing revolver bullets to whiz round my own and my companion's head. The Nationalists wrote to the Press demanding my deportation. It was probably this pressure which caused the Government to decide on a strange line of action. Apart from the plain-clothes men, two constables with fixed bayonets were installed in the lodge near the sanatorium gates. It was rumoured that my companion and I were planning to escape. One day my lawyer came to see me, and told me that he had heard on the highest possible authority that it would be advisable for me to leave Czechoslovakia at once. We packed our few possessions, and the next day a motor car arrived carrying a plain-clothes man and our lawyer. The two policemen in the lodge did not move as we walked by. The plain-clothes man remained behind, and our lawyer travelled with us to the Czech-Austrian border at Znaim. The frontier officials had been notified of our arrival, and we were

smuggled across the border, though we had no passports or documents of any kind. The Czechs were rid of me. They had not derived any pleasure from my sojourn, and they left it to the Austrians to decide what they would do with me while I was in their country. I had been released from the prison in Jitschin towards the end of August, and I had remained in the sanatorium less than a month.

I arrived in Austria early in October. At first I lived in a small *pension*, in Eichgraben near Vienna. Then I moved to the Preissnitzthal sanatorium in Moedling. Here I received a delegation of comrades from the Vogtland. They said that a number of Red soldiers were being tried in Dresden, and that many of them had already been sentenced. The comrades from the Vogtland thought that if I returned to Germany I might help the comrades who had been sentenced, and their families. I therefore gave up my intention of going to Russia from Vienna and decided to attempt to release the comrades who were imprisoned in Dresden and Plauen.

With the help of a student in Vienna, who sympathised with our cause and who had very good connections, I managed to get a passport issued to a certain Alexander Matiasek.

I returned to Germany by way of Passau, where my passport was inspected. I must admit that I felt a bit nervous when the frontier officials were inspecting it. I was running a considerable risk, as I was wearing no disguise at all, except a pair of

spectacles. I had parted my hair, which normally was very bushy, and I had shaved off my moustache. I travelled from Passau to Hof, where I hired a motor car. A few weeks before Christmas, in 1920, I was able to surprise my comrades in Falkenstein and Oelsnitz by my sudden appearance.

My return to the Vogtland relieved my intense spiritual depression. In Vienna I had not been able to associate with the working class, because my pursuers would have found me too easily. I had bought good middle-class clothes, and only went to places of amusement frequented by the upper classes. I attended the opera, theatres and cabarets, and many elegant restaurants. I knew that with my glasses and my neatly parted hair, no one in these places of amusement would suspect me of being Hoelz.

When I returned to the Vogtland I realised that it was indeed time for me to give up this middle class life, because I had become estranged from the workers both in my attitude and in my outward standards of living. They always considered me one of themselves, who dressed as they did, and who understood their language.

Now they were disappointed to see a man who was apparently interested in nice clothes and all the other middle-class trivialities. My outward appearance estranged them; it was as though a chasm separated me from the workers in the Vogtland.

I realised at this time that all my revolutionary efforts would be still-born if I did not succeed in winning back the confidence of the workers in the

Vogtland. To this end it was necessary to get rid of the middle-class mannerisms which I had been obliged to cultivate while I had been in foreign countries.

From the Vogtland I travelled to Ilten, near Hanover, to visit my family. Only two or three particularly reliable comrades knew about my return to Oelsnitz in the Vogtland. Nevertheless some spy or other had heard of my arrival, for as I was walking towards the Hof omnibus I noticed a number of plain-clothes men at the stopping place. I turned round just in time.

The comrade and his wife in whose house I had been stopping the night, walked with me to Hof. During the tiresome walk I was constantly afraid that the spies were on our trail.

When we arrived in Hof at about one o'clock at night I sent the comrade and his wife to the station to see whether the coast was clear, while I engaged a room in the hotel opposite the station. The comrade was to let me know if any spies appeared in the station before the train was due to leave. I waited for hours in the hotel room, but no one came.

I decided to go to the station, but as I walked across the square I noticed that an unusually large number of policemen were entering the station building in groups of twos and threes.

A number of them ran directly past me, and I realised what had happened. The comrade and his wife had not come to the hotel, as this might have put the police on to my trail.

I ran into a dark side street, as I wanted to get away from the station. Then I heard footsteps behind me; soon the sound of shouting and whistling was audible. About twenty yards ahead of me, at the side of the road, I saw a wooden fence, about two yards in height, which surrounded a site on which building materials were stored. I jumped over the fence, tearing my clothes on the barbed wire, and hid among a pile of planks.

A whole regiment of policemen were on my trail. They searched for hours, and light from their pocket torches was continually flashing round me.

I remained in my hiding place for about an hour. It was a very cold night in November. Suddenly I heard a rustling sound. Before me, in the dark, I saw a huge police dog, smelling the ground. I expected every moment that the dog would jump at me and begin to bark. I was so frightened that I held my breath, staring at the dog. But it made no noise and soon trotted away.

I did not want to risk a second visit from this animal, so I jumped over the fence. I had leapt from the frying pan into the fire, for the police were still searching for me. Choosing the direction which I thought must lead out of the town, I began to run as though I was being pursued by a thousand devils. I crossed a large marshy field, covered with thin ice. I had to wade through the icy water or give myself up to my pursuers, whose attention had been attracted to me because I was running so quickly. I ran about in this frozen swamp for about an hour

before I finally found dry land on the outskirts of the town.

By now it was six o'clock in the morning. My flight had been made somewhat easier by the darkness. I was in a most deplorable condition: my clothing was torn and I was wet to the skin, my teeth were chattering and I was weary and hungry. My hat had disappeared during my flight. Luckily I had not lost my thin overcoat, which I had carried over my arm. I put it on over my drenched clothes, so that I should not be so conspicuous, for I began to meet people going to their work.

I walked towards a small railway station, and reached Hanover by a roundabout route. The next morning I left the train at the station before Hanover and walked the rest of the way, for I wanted to avoid any spies who might have been watching the station at Hanover.

Much snow had fallen, and I caught a very bad cold.

My wife Clara was not at home. She was with my sister in Ilten. I sent the landlady to Ilten in a taxi-cab, asking her to bring my wife back with her. I planned to remain in Hanover only for a short time, as I wanted to organise the release of my comrades in Dresden as soon as possible.

My wife arrived towards evening. We did not stay in her rooms. Instead we lodged with the sister of a reliable comrade, who lived in the fourth story of a tenement house.

Suddenly, towards midnight, there was a knocking

at the door. My first thought was – the police. The landlady slept in the other room. She was clever enough not to open the door at once. Instead she called out: ‘Just a moment, I must slip on some clothes.’ In the meantime she rushed into our room and asked what she was to do. I quickly collected all my belongings, so that the police would find no trace of me, and climbed on to the roof through a small window, asking the woman to close the window after me and to put an alarm clock on the window sill. On the roof I hid behind a chimney.

I was only half dressed, and the hours I spent on the roof were terrible – I was afraid I would freeze to death. At six o’clock I was so cold that I preferred to risk being arrested rather than to spend another hour on the roof. I crawled back into the flat. It was deserted, and I was afraid that both my wife and the comrade’s sister had been arrested. In a few hours the women returned, saying that they had put the police on a wrong track.

I learned that my sister and my wife were responsible for this incident. A week before they had met two men in a café in Hanover, who had claimed to be jockeys. My sister invited them to come and see her in Ilten. Clara was present whenever they came. The two expressed a profound interest in my sister and my wife – and the two women rushed into the trap.

The night before my arrival in Hanover the two men had again visited my sister and my wife in Ilten. There was a great deal to drink, and they found

out that my wife was expecting me some time soon. When she was called for by the taxi-cab, the two men took down the number of the cab. They easily found out our address in Hanover through the taxi-driver. Then they intimidated my wife's landlady until she told them where we were spending the night.

Later, when I reached the street, and looked up at the snow-covered roof on which I had spent the night, I was amazed to see how steep and slippery it was. It was a miracle that I had not slipped off. I suppose only people who are mad or moonstruck or desperate can have such narrow escapes.

CHAPTER VII

INSURRECTION

AFTER remaining incognito in Brunswick for a short time I left for Berlin towards the end of December. I wanted to discuss my plans for liberating our friends in Dresden with some of the comrades in Berlin. I had not met any of the national leaders of the Communist Workers' Party before, and I was glad to get in touch with them. I never agreed with their tactics, though they had expected that a man of my temperament must agree with them as a matter of course.

I had learned that an emotional support of the oppressed was not enough. In my opinion a social revolution could be brought about only with the help of those means of attack which I had learned to despise in the war. When I returned from the front I had been a pacifist, but my experiences in the Vogtland and my knowledge of the theory and practice of the class war had taught me that economic or political reforms would never bring about a real liberation of the working classes. I realised, on the contrary, that a successful fight for political control cannot be waged without all possible means. For the middle-classes are using their political control to maintain the oppression of the workers. My

studies of the proletarian revolution had taught me, furthermore, that the social revolution cannot be brought about by one armed insurrection alone – though armed revolt can, of course, become a very successful means to that end – but that, on the whole, a change of the social order is the result of certain economic conditions and certain social forces.

If, however, a united armed insurrection had been arranged by one of the workers' political organisations, I should, of course, have taken part. In given circumstances an armed insurrection is the only practical method by which the workers can gain control of the State. In Berlin I heard nothing of preparations for an insurrection of this kind, so I concentrated my efforts on the liberation of the comrades who had been arrested as a result of the *Kapp-Putsch*. To this end I organised a group of about fifty comrades from Berlin, the Vogtland, and Brunswick. I equipped them with arms and bicycles. There was enough money left from the fund raised among the Vogtland capitalists during the *Kapp-Putsch* to pay for these preparations.

During my illegal sojourn in Berlin I met Ferry, alias Hering, who was planning to blow up the *Siegessäule*.* Ferry had heard that my friends and I wanted to manufacture bombs and hand-grenades, but that we lacked the technical knowledge. He knew that we had plenty of money, and offered to

* The "Victory Column" – a huge and hideous column crowned by a ponderous gilt figure symbolising victory. It was erected to commemorate the German victory over the French in the war of 1870-71.

manufacture them for us, as he was a chemist. In return we were to give him money, so that he could buy explosives with which to blow up the *Siegessäule*.

We agreed to this plan, and a few weeks later he sent us a large number of bombs and hand-grenades. His assistants and my friends had stolen dynamite from quarries, potash mines, and other mines in Central Germany and the Ruhr district.

Ferry was greatly respected by his assistants and his friends. They were enthusiastic about him, and considered him a staunch revolutionary and a very good fellow.

When I met him in Eisleben during the Central German insurrection, however, it was quite obvious that he was not a real revolutionary. I had been glad to meet him, for I had thought that he would fight with me against the *Sipo*.^{*} He had no intention of helping me, however, on the contrary, he wanted me to help him and asked me for a great quantity of dynamite, which he wanted to use in Berlin for some purpose or other.

My first impression of Ferry was strengthened by his later development. While I was in the prison

1. The *Sipo* . . . In the revolutionary troubles after the war the bigger armed risings were crushed by troops, but for smaller disorders a special constabulary was formed – they were armed, had a semi-military character, and were known as the 'Security Police' or *Sicherheitspolizei* (abbreviated to *Sipo*). At the request of the Allied Powers both their arms and their numbers were reduced and they were converted into the non-military police force of to-day, the *Schutzpolizei* (abbreviated to *Schupo*).

I learned from his former friends that, after his conviction in the *Siegessäule* case, he made every effort to be pardoned. His behaviour in prison was so perfect that he was released after a few years. To-day he is employed by some Social Democrat Trades Union, and leads a very *bourgeois* life.

I planned to use the bombs and hand-grenades made by Ferry to liberate the comrades in Dresden, Leipzig, and Hof. I hoped to disquiet the authorities and terrorise the population by blowing up Law Courts in various localities at an appointed hour. During the panic which was sure to result, we were going to free our comrades. I did not expect any political results for the Communist Party from these explosions. They were merely a means to an end.

We first tried out Ferry's bombs and hand-grenades in the *Jungfernheide*.* Their explosive force was satisfactory, but the fuses were damp and too long. After we had corrected these faults we planned to blow up the police headquarters in Charlottenburg. We walked round this massive building at night, seeking a place to set our bombs. In the end, however, we found no place which would have been suitable enough to assure our success.

I did not want our comrades to say that I sent them into danger while I remained in a safe place, so I planned to carry out the first explosion myself. I wanted my comrades to see how I worked. I went to the Vogtland with them to blow up the large

* A large heath on the fringe of Berlin.

entrance portal to the Town Hall in Falkenstein. This explosion, and the leaflets which we were planning to distribute, were to attract the workers' and the *bourgeoisie's* attention to the fact that we Communists were still alive, even though we were being persecuted by the police. We also wanted them to realise that we had not forgotten our comrades, who were in prison, and that we were planning to use all means to set them free.

On the 6th of March, 1921, we arrived in Falkenstein at eleven o'clock at night. The Town Hall was to be bombed at midnight. Before this time a number of preparations had to be made.

To increase the explosive power of the bomb, which was rather large, I had planned to place it in a closed room in the Town Hall. A few seconds before midnight I ran towards the Town Hall with the bomb. Comrade Richard Loose was with me. The others were to watch the explosion from a safe distance. Loose was to throw a hand-grenade as soon as I had set the bomb; in case the fuse did not function, the hand-grenade would detonate the bomb. As I was trying the door to the police station, into which I had decided to throw the bomb, I lit the fuse with my cigarette. In four seconds the bomb would explode. Comrade Loose had released the safety catch of the hand-grenade. Then I noticed to my horror that the door was locked. We were lost.

I was holding the ignited bomb in my hand, while Loose held the hand-grenade. We threw them into a corner almost instantaneously. The hand-

grenade exploded. A splinter struck my face, from which blood began to flow. For the moment I could see nothing at all. By acting quickly Comrade Loose saved my life. When he noticed that my face was bleeding and that I was staggering, he took hold of me firmly, pulled me down the steps, and walked me round the corner. At this moment the surrounding buildings were shaken by a tremendous explosion. A number of windows were smashed, and huge blocks of stone rolled out on the street.

Richard Loose dragged me to a street in the neighbourhood. When I was finally able to open my eyes I saw that we were standing directly in front of the house of the leader of the Citizen Guard. About six months before this man had ordered his men to open fire on a crowd of workers. To punish him I threw six hand-grenades, which I still had with me, into his house, where they exploded with a terrific crash. I learned later that this man was even luckier than I was myself, for he remained quite unhurt.

Despite the fact that I was wounded we cycled as fast as we could all night long. At dawn we halted in Werdau with some comrades. Here my wounds were cleansed and bandaged. The same day I travelled by train to Leipzig, where I stayed until I had completely recovered. Then I returned to Berlin. I sent out my comrades, armed with bombs, to a number of cities. These bombs did their work according to plan in cities such as Dresden, Freiburg, and Leipzig, where the workers had

been most unfairly treated. These bombings of Law Courts created a considerable commotion. *Bourgeois* and Socialist papers expressed a fear which amounted to panic, and I was satisfied with the confusion I had caused.

I was not, however, fundamentally pleased or satisfied with the result. I was becoming more and more convinced that this was not the best way to fight for the Communist cause and its aims. True, it took a certain personal courage to stage terroristic actions of this kind, but these individual attacks can never really take the place of mass actions. My individual actions during the two years when I was being persecuted had really resulted from the fact that I was completely isolated from political and Trade Union organisations. I realised bitterly that because of my lack of Trade Union and political experience I had brought upon myself years of persecution. I had made a serious political mistake when I had approved of the robbing of banks and post offices. It was true, of course, that the stolen money was handed over to the leaders of the German Communist Workers' Party. These funds therefore served a certain political purpose, because they were used to print Communist newspapers and propaganda leaflets. Only a small proportion of the funds, however, was used to help comrades who were being persecuted, and who were living 'illegally' in various parts of Germany. The 'Red Help', the proletarian relief association, had not as yet been founded.

The political advantages derived from these 'expropriations' of banks was not, however, great enough to compensate for the harm they did to the Communist cause. Apart from the fact that most of the revolutionary Communist workers neither approved of nor understood these expropriations, it should be borne in mind that a number of comrades were thoroughly corrupted by these robberies.

One evening in January, I was arranging to make an assault on a post office in a Berlin suburb. My friends and I encircled the post office. We were unexpectedly prevented from carrying out our plan. This was the first and only time I had participated in an expropriation of this kind.

I was unable to liberate my imprisoned comrades as I had planned to do, because the Central German insurrection broke out just at this time.

The insurrection of the workers in Central Germany in March, 1921, was the direct result of Hörsing's* policy, according to which 'an attack is the best defence.' Hörsing knew quite well that the workers in Central Germany had by no means lost their revolutionary enthusiasm. He also realised that their seething discontent must soon find some expression. For this reason he sent armed *Sipos* to guard the Central Germany mines and factories. Ostensibly the function of these armed police was to prevent ordinary thefts in the works.

* Hörsing was a member of the Socialist Party whom the Communists held responsible for repressive measures in Upper Silesia in 1919 and in Central Germany in 1921.

The undernourished and underpaid workmen were, of course, infuriated at the thought that they were to work under police supervision. On Monday, the 21st of March, I read in a Berlin evening paper that a strike had been declared in Central Germany. I decided to go there at once to study the situation at first hand. After I had done this I planned to offer my services to the local workers' organisation.

Less than two hours after I had read the news, five comrades and I took the train for Central Germany. As by this time a price of 55,000 marks was being offered to anyone who would turn me over to the police, I made every effort to travel as unobtrusively as possible.

I did not get into the train until just before it left the station. During the journey I noticed that two officers sitting in my compartment were Secret Service agents attached to the 1A Department.* They were discussing occurrences in Central Germany in a whisper.

Quite contrary to schedule the train suddenly stopped in Kloster-Mansfeld. The guard told us that the engine had to take in water. This was a favourable opportunity for us. I motioned to the comrade who was in the compartment with me, and we quietly left the train and the station. As we did so – it was one o'clock in the morning – I noticed three dark figures were following us closely. My first thought was that we had jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. We discovered later, how-

* 'Abteilung 1A' is the political department of the Prussian police.

ever, that these men were members of the strike committee, who had thought that we might be scabs or spies. Then we joined forces and walked together to the central committee-rooms of the strikers in Kloster-Mansfeld. At first I did not mention my name to these comrades. I decided to maintain my incognito until I had studied the situation thoroughly. I was able to remain unknown because in the summer of 1919, when I had worked in the Mansfeld district and Kloster-Mansfeld, I had spoken in a number of meetings under the name of 'Sturm.' The comrades in the district knew Hoelz only by name.

When we arrived in the town – the station is situated at a considerable distance from the town itself – a night meeting was just being held by the executive committee. My comrade introduced himself as a comrade and said that I was a political fugitive from justice. We attended the meeting. There was no discussion at all of an armed insurrection. The workers thought that a general strike would force the 'Socialist' Hörsing to withdraw his armed supervisors from the district. The next day I spoke in meetings in Hettstedt, Mansfeld, and Eisleben, where the plans for the general strike were being discussed. The meeting in Hettstedt was a very exciting one, because the workers discovered some spies in their midst, who were forcibly removed from the hall. The determination and solidarity of the workers was shown in all these meetings. All the workers, regardless of party – the meetings were attended by members of the Independent Socialist

Party, Communist Party, the Communist Labour Party, and the A.U.*— were determined to maintain the general strike until the ‘Socialist’ Hörsing had removed his men.

The Socialist and Independent Socialist workers did not know that their treacherous leaders themselves – at a meeting with the authorities in Eisleben – had approved of the presence of *Sipo* in the factories. These ‘classical’ leaders had wisely refused to have their names included in Hörsing’s proclamation. A meeting had been called in Eisleben at six o’clock that evening, and the workers from the surrounding towns and mines were asked to be present. I was greatly concerned as to how I could reach the city, for a large number of *Sipo* had been stationed in Eisleben. I was quite sure that after my adventures in Hettstedt and Mansfeld the *Sipo* in Eisleben would make every effort to arrest me. I was sure that they would make an effort not only because of the reward of 55,000 marks, but chiefly because my arrest might check the progress of the insurrection.

It was reported in Kloster-Mansfeld that a number of unorganised workers had been intimidated by threats from the management, and that they were continuing to work despite the strike.

After the meeting I visited the surrounding mines with several Mansfeld comrades, and we urged the scabs to join the general strike.

* The *Arbeiter Union* was a radical, semi-Communist working-class group.

At about six o'clock in the evening I left the mines and cycled to Eisleben with Comrade Richard Loose. As we approached the town we met a patrol of about thirty *Sipo* cyclists. It seemed that the owners of the surrounding mines had summoned the police to help them to fight against the striking workmen.

At first I was very much afraid, for it would have been most unpleasant to be arrested five minutes before the large meeting, at which I was to speak. My first impulse was to turn round and then try to reach Eisleben by another route. My companion persuaded me of the hopelessness of this plan. If we had turned round so suddenly the police would have become suspicious, and they would probably have shot at us. We were forced to make a quick decision, and I decided to cycle straight ahead. When there were only about thirty yards between me and the police I steered sharply to the right and cycled towards the lieutenant who was riding at the head of the patrol. When I was five yards away from him I shouted: 'It is high time that you came. Conditions in the coalfields are very bad.' He smiled at these words of encouragement, and cycled on. As I passed him I brushed his arm with my elbow. He had no idea how near he was to the possibility of increasing his salary by the reward offered for my arrest.

At such moments – which occurred frequently during the next few days – my heart stopped beating for seconds at a time, but after they had passed I felt

that I had just been born. All the streets leading to the central district of the town were guarded by police patrols.

All the police looked at us sharply, but no one stopped us, probably because we saluted them so politely. My heart beat fast as we passed dozens of police patrols. I asked a few boys quietly whether any meeting was being held in the town. We finally reached the hall where the meeting was being held, and we were welcomed by hundreds of enthusiastic workers.

It was at this meeting that I first met Josef Schneider, with whom I worked during the next few days. Schneider edited the party paper in Eisleben, and was the leader of the local Communist movement. It was a funny sight to see this small, fat man driving through the streets crowded with strikers, in a little tub-like motor car, which he had requisitioned from somewhere. Anyone not knowing him would have taken him for a fat capitalist. Despite his small size Schneider moved quickly. His organising talent became quite evident during the fight. I turned over the commissariat as well as the administration of the requisitioned funds to him, and he did both jobs very well. He was also my chief Press agent, and as such he wrote daily reports about the insurrection, which he sent to organisations and newspapers in neighbouring towns. His wife and child, which was only a year old, were arrested by the police as hostages. As a reprisal we arrested the naval surgeon Evers, and his wife.

After the last battle in Besenstedt Schneider salved the party funds and drove away in his motor car. He was almost the only Central German insurgent who escaped to Russia.

The meeting decided unanimously to continue the general strike until Hörsing withdrew his police. On this day I did not notice one worker in Eisleben who was armed.

Undoubtedly, however, many of them possessed arms which they had captured during the *Kapp-Putsch*, but it is equally sure that the workers would never have used these arms if the brutality of the police had not forced them to do so. After the meeting I returned to Kloster-Mansfeld which was the news centre for all the towns in the strike district.

On the night from the 22nd to the 23rd of March I was informed by despatch riders that after the meeting the police had arrested a number of workers who had taken part in it, and that they had been badly maltreated.

The workers' attempt to release these comrades resulted in the first hand-to-hand struggle between the police and the working-class. During this struggle the workers did not use arms. The unjustified and brutal attacks of the police, however, forced the workers to take up arms so that their arrested comrades might be released and that the police might be withdrawn. This was the situation on the morning of the 23rd of March.

Now my chief task no longer consisted in holding meetings. Instead I began to organise the workers,

who had armed so spontaneously, into fighting units.

On the morning of the 23rd of March I sent comrades to Berlin, Hanover, Brunswick, Halle, and into the Vogtland, to establish the necessary contacts with party headquarters. Then I organised a company of shock troops. This company was to be the backbone of our forces. On the first day I was able to find only fifty rifles and three machine guns for this company. One of the chief problems of military organisation is the rationing of the fighting troops. During the *Kapp-Putsch* in the Vogtland I had learned that widespread insurrections are only possible if the troops are properly fed.

I entrusted four reliable comrades with the job of securing the funds necessary for the purchase of food and clothing for the troops. These comrades kept accurate accounts of receipts and expenditure. Banknotes for 1,000 marks were only handed to messengers of the Communist Workers' Party after receipts had been given. The party asked for money almost daily. This money was used for the printing of newspapers and propaganda leaflets. The workers' headquarters were situated in Eisleben and Hettstedt. Both of these towns were police headquarters. We marched on to Eisleben, for we wanted to drive the police out of the town. At three o'clock in the afternoon we met some of the comrades from Eisleben and Wimmelburg. Earlier in the afternoon they had a successful encounter with the police, three of whom had been taken prisoners.

In Eisleben the *Sipo* were quartered in two buildings, the city hospital and the teachers' seminary.

With the help of a machine gun and twenty rifles some of our comrades shot at the police in the seminary. In the meantime I led another troop (we now had about ninety rifles) against the city hospital. When we were about fifty yards away from the hospital it would have been possible to move forward quickly and defeat the police, but this attack might have cost us twenty or thirty men.

I considered all these attacks to be merely preliminary skirmishes, and for this reason it was my duty to avoid casualties as much as possible. A ruse was necessary to drive the police out of the hospital building. The police troop consisted of 400 men, who were armed to the teeth, whereas we had only ninety rifles altogether.

In order to drive the *Sipo* out of Eisleben without casualties, therefore, I adopted a plan which was utterly condemned by the *bourgeoisie* and was considered a crime by many of the Communist Party leaders in Berlin. I sent two messengers to the mayor, telling him that if he did not order the police to leave the town at once I would set fire to every part of it.

I did not expect for a moment that the mayor would communicate this order to Folte, the major in charge of the police. I did, however, firmly expect that the police would leave the hospital building in order to prevent us from setting fire to

the place. In this event we would be able to attack the police in the streets, which would have been to our advantage.

To emphasise my threat I set fire to a building near by. Then eight comrades and I went to the centre of the town where we smashed a few large windows, so that the frightened *bourgeoisie* and the mayor would call for the *Sipo*'s assistance. I had performed this unpleasant task myself, so as to prevent any transgression of my orders.

At this point anyone would have expected that the police would have made an effort to re-establish law and order, especially as, apart from their arms, they were numerically so much stronger than the workers.

In my plan, however, I had made one serious mistake: I had over-estimated the courage of the police. Although the mayor had telephoned to police headquarters at once, reporting the disorder we were creating in the town, and although he had implored the police to protect his threatened town, the *Sipo* remained quietly within the protective walls of their quarters.

When I realised that my ruse had failed I ordered some of the workers' soldiers to put out the fire. Apart from a few curtains and a blanket nothing had been burnt.

In the evening we withdrew from Eisleben and established our headquarters in Helbra, where bad news was awaiting us. In Helbra the police had captured the strike headquarters; books and docu-

ments had been taken, and a number of workers had been arrested. Two men had been shot down in the street like dogs. One of them was sixteen years old, and the other was a worker of fifty. As the young man lay dying in the road an officer dug his heel into his face and said: 'The swine deserved nothing better.'

In Helbra I was also informed that the comrades Roth, Grünberg and Müller had not been sufficiently careful, and that as a result our 'war funds' had been taken away from them after they had been arrested in Quedlinburg. I had provided these comrades with a motor car, and I had instructed them to drive away from the fighting zone with the money, and to wait for me in a little wood near Annarode. Contrary to my orders, however, they had stopped at an inn on the way, without paying any attention to the driver, who was not at all friendly towards us. He in turn telephoned to the police in Quedlinburg, and reported that Hoelz in a motor-car carrying some stolen money was about to drive through their city. While they were driving he had overheard the comrades say that they were going to Quedlinburg.

Comrade Roth was wearing my seal-ring with my initials M.H. engraved on it, as well as my watch. Apart from this he was supposed to have looked something like me. He was therefore arrested and handcuffed at once. When asked if he was Hoelz he said he was.

Roth was able to escape the next morning, despite the strict supervision in the military prison. He had

asked the other two comrades to join him, but they had refused because, so they believed, any attempt to escape would be too dangerous. Comrade Grünberg, however, helped Karl Roth to escape. While the prisoners were walking round and round in a circle in the courtyard of the prison Grünberg pretended to have a fit. While the attention of the warder was concentrated on Grünberg, Roth climbed over the prison wall and escaped.

Fritz Grünberg was severely punished, for it soon became apparent that he was not an epileptic. He was locked up in a dark cell and terribly beaten. For days the other prisoners heard his desperate cries. He was so depressed by the darkness of his cell and by the abuses he had suffered that he cut open the artery of his wrist with a piece of broken glass, and wrote a farewell letter to his family with his own blood.

That night I sent a party of soldier workers to the explosives factory at Leimbach in a lorry, and told them to requisition the dynamite we needed for the manufacture of explosive bombs, as we had no mines.

We were forced to use every means to defeat our adversaries, and our troops were very insufficiently armed when the fight began.

On Thursday, the 24th of March, a relatively long battle occurred in Hettstedt. In order to confuse the various *Sipo* detachments I first attacked Eisleben and then Hettstedt. An increasing number of men from the surrounding villages had joined our forces,

so that the workers' troops were more powerful than they had been. I was able to organise four companies of attack, consisting of a hundred men and six machine-gun units each.

The enemy controlled transport and communications such as the telephone and wireless. The workers' troops had none of these facilities at their disposal. Our means of communication were more primitive, but we could not do without them, as it was so important for our various troops to remain in touch. We had twenty cyclist dispatch-riders, who were very useful when it came to delivering messages between various localities, but they were, of course, entirely inadequate when messages had to be sent across the firing line. As a rule unarmed workers acted as our messengers on such occasions.

The heterogeneous groups of miners and industrial workers had developed into a well organised army of attack. This army was not held together by blind obedience as the old Wilhelmian army had been held together. On the contrary this new army was based on voluntary proletarian self-discipline.

During all these battles none of my men was ever hesitant or cowardly. All the comrades knew that I never gave an order which I would not have been willing to carry out myself. I tried to do all the most complicated and most difficult jobs myself, and this caused the men to have complete confidence in me.

During the morning my couriers and cyclists brought me messages from the executive committees

of all the towns in the district. I issued an order asking all able-bodied men to come to Helbra and Kloster-Mansfeld. I realised that the insurrection would be a political and a military success only if I was able to build up an army of at least 10,000 men in the Mansfeld district during the next few days.

I realised that a small army consisting of a few hundred men could only attain a very local success at the most, but when I suggested organising a larger fighting unit, including men from a larger number of towns, many of my comrades opposed the plan.

I sent messengers daily to the party headquarters in Berlin, Brunswick, Hanover, Halle, and other large cities. I tried in every way to establish contacts with the party organisations, but I received no help from them. Only once – from the party headquarters in Halle – did I receive a brief order signed by some leading members of the Communist Workers' Party and Communist Party in Berlin, saying that they approved of my activities, that they agreed to my acting as commander-in-chief of the fighting troops, and that I must, by all means, hold out until the . . . (the date was given).

On the 24th of March, at noon, some of my men and I drove to Hettstedt in lorries. The Hettstedt *Sipo* had been reinforced, and they planned to attack us in our headquarters. I was quicker than they were, however, and began the attack. The police had cut off the roads leading into the city.

The street fighting which ensued was very severe and lasted until the evening, but we succeeded in driving the police into the centre of the town. Then our first bombing activities began.

Through my field-glasses I noticed that an engine was leaving the Hettstedt station, although no trains at all had been running. I was right when I thought that the *Sipo* was planning to drive the engine into our midst.

With the help of two of my comrades I placed two bombs on the lines and planned to set them off as soon as the engine approached. I was, however, so inexperienced that I had cut the fuses far too short. Consequently a terrific explosion occurred after I had barely left the tracks, and I had a very narrow escape. I had, however, attained my purpose, and the *Sipo* were forced to withdraw from our heavy machine-gun fire.

In the evening I called together all our men who were lying around the town, in order that we might make a united attack on Hettstedt that night.

We hoped, by such an attack, to take the police by surprise, so that they would be forced to surrender. We were not, however, willing to sacrifice everything to the success of this plan. On the contrary, we wanted to protect the life of every fighting workman. When strategy or necessity demanded, it was always better to use a ruse than to use force. It was better, for instance, to burn down the home of a profiteer than to sacrifice the life of a revolutionary worker.

As we advanced towards the schoolhouse, in which the *Sipo* was stationed, I was forced to bomb a number of buildings. I bombed a part of the station, two private residences, and a printing plant, which was near the *Sipo* headquarters. Assisted by two comrades, I carried out these bombings myself. My judges decided later that I had done so merely from a lust for destruction, but they, apparently, have no idea of the difficulties which force the poorly armed fighting workman to act during a civil war.

In Hettstedt it would have been impossible for me to advance without heavy losses unless I had bombed these buildings. An explosion of this kind causes a huge cloud of smoke to hang in the air for half an hour or longer. This cloud of smoke eased our advance during the street battle, as the enemy could not see us and could not therefore take aim so effectively. By bombing these houses I saved the lives of many workmen.

After the last explosion the police withdrew into the school-house. All their patrols disappeared from the streets. We learned from a few men, whom we had taken prisoner, that reinforcements for the police were on their way from Sangerhausen. It was almost four o'clock in the morning, and our comrades were in urgent need of a few hours rest.

I led the troops back to Helbra. I always carried out the basic tactics on which I founded all my actions, and which were the chief reasons why we were able to resist the far stronger enemy for ten whole days. I never let the enemy know what I was

going to do next, and I never remained in one town for more than twenty-four hours. The statement which Major Folte made later, before the court at Moabit, indicates to what extent I puzzled my adversaries. When the judge asked him why it took the *Sipo* so long to encircle and defeat the Red army, Folte said: 'It was difficult to get hold of Hoelz; we always knew that he was a sly fellow.'

On Friday, the 25th of March, even more severe fighting occurred in Eisleben. Early in the evening the workers attacked the *Sipo*. We were able to advance into the centre of the town and to occupy the Town Hall. On this occasion we bombed the residence of Dr. Evers, who had been the chief surgeon in the Imperial German Navy. Evers, who was an arch-reactionary and an enemy of the working class, had hidden large quantities of arms and ammunition belonging to the *Orgesh** in his house.

The police were greatly surprised by our attack, and laid mines near the hall in the market place.

Eight of our men had already been wounded, and we could not remain in the town because of the mines. I had also received other information which caused me to leave the town at once. We stopped in Wimmelburg for a brief rest. Here we were joined by a number of small and large troops of revolutionary workers, who had come from all directions to meet us. On that day our little army numbered 2,500 men. From some of these men I

* The 'Organisation Escherich,' a force of citizen volunteers founded by the Bavarian Forester Escherich to combat Bolshevism.

heard the news about events in the Merseburg district. I therefore tried at once to leave Wimmelburg, which was being encircled more and more closely by the police. I hoped to unite the workers' troops in Teutschenthal with those in the Leuna works.

It was, indeed, high time that we got out of Wimmelburg, which had become a veritable witches' cauldron. A few hours after our departure the regulars and the *Sipo* made a joint attack on the town. In a true Wilhelmian manner they gave vent to their anger by maltreating unarmed workmen, who had not taken any part in the insurrection. Weeks afterwards the dead bodies of workmen were found buried in the slagpits of the mines, where they had been interred as though they had been mad dogs. That was the workers' reward for having treated their *Sipo* prisoners like human beings. Not one of these prisoners had been killed; all of them, in fact, had been returned unharmed to their troops after the insurrection.

On the 26th of March we advanced on Sangerhausen with ten lorries. I had planned only to pass through this town on our way to Halle. My chief desire was to give the workers a warm meal in the town. They had been poorly and irregularly fed during the preceding days. Each inn was ordered to prepare meals for a hundred to a hundred and fifty workers.

Not half an hour after our arrival in the town we were unexpectedly visited by an armoured train

bearing the Würtemburg insignia. Though we had fought bitterly the night before, and had not even enjoyed an hour's rest, all the worker-soldiers took up their arms cheerfully.

The men swarmed out of the armoured train and occupied the station. The brave Swabians used up a good deal of ammunition, while we, on the other hand, were forced to be rather economical. After a battle which lasted for four hours they withdrew again into their train. We captured a few rifles and one machine-gun. The enemy suffered serious losses; our casualties were one dead and several wounded.

The revolutionary soldier-workers did not eat their dinner until evening. Late that night we left Sangerhausen, planning to spend the coming Sunday, which we should pass in Schraplau, as a day of rest. The inhabitants of this little town, which was situated near some chalk works, were very class-conscious, and they received us enthusiastically. That evening the worker-soldiers received their wages for the first time. The finance and commissariat department of the troops was entrusted with the payment. Each man received fifty marks.

In Schraplau I met comrades Lembke and Bowitzki, who had led the attack at Teutschenthal. Though they had both been sent out by the party, neither of them had received further orders from party headquarters.

We resolved to concentrate all our troops that night and to join forces with the troops in the Leuna

works. Then we planned to march on to Halle by way of Ammendorf. In Halle we hoped to arrange a surprise and capture the artillery which was kept in the town. On the night from Sunday to Monday our troops marched from Schraplau to Ammendorf.

On Monday, the 28th of March, the fatal battle of Ammendorf occurred. We reached Ammendorf, which is near Halle, early in the morning as planned.

I sent Comrade Alfred Lembke to the Leuna works, where he was to establish the necessary contact with the comrades there. He was then to bring the men who wanted to fight to Ammendorf in lorries. Above all he was to try to get some more munitions, for our supply was practically exhausted.

I advanced towards Halle with about 2,000 men, who had been distributed along a front about two miles long. Two thousand yards before we reached Halle we encountered the police. As we lacked ammunition we could not afford to risk an attack.

I waited impatiently for the arrival of the workers from the Leuna works. Most of our soldiers had only one or two cartridges left. Two hours later Comrade Lembke returned from the Leuna works in a motor car, with a thousand rounds. He also reported that the comrades in the Leuna works were sending fresh recruits to us at once. But before these men arrived the enemy had encircled us. Hundreds of policemen arrived in fast lorries on the roads from Merseburg, Osendorf, and Halle.

I tried to release my comrades from the clutches of the *Sipo*. Many of the fighting workmen were already being driven out of Ammendorf. On the horse of one of our messengers I rode towards the retiring troops and ordered them to hold the line at all costs. I planned to attack the police from the rear as soon as the men arrived from the Leuna works.

I then walked to where our advance guard was stationed. I was almost caught by the *Sipo*. For a moment I thought I was lost. Then I heard someone calling me by my first name. A number of miners who were doing some emergency work on the road had recognised me. They appreciated my danger, and took me down a coal mine. These workmen proved to be loyal members of the party. From time to time they brought me news of what was happening above.

The majority of our troops had escaped from the clutches of the *Sipo*. I asked one of the comrades to find out where it would be best for me to join my men.

The shaft in which I was sitting was hundreds of yards beneath the surface of the earth. I was next to the large motors working the pumps, and the noise was terrific. Despite this noise and my dangerous position – I was sitting on an unsteady board over the machine – I fell into a dead sleep. Nature demanded her rights after so much excitement and so many sleepless nights.

Then a comrade shook me, and said: ‘Max, it’s

time.' I climbed out of the mine on slippery ladders, which seemed interminable. An elderly miner, who was a member of the party and of the works council of the mine, offered to conduct me to Gröebers, where my men were fighting. In Gröebers I did not find my own men, as I had expected. Instead I met a company of workers, including men from Bitterfeld and Holtzweisig, which was led by Comrade Tiemann.

Gerhard Tiemann, who came from Werdau in Saxony, had not been able to find employment at home, because he was a Communist. He had therefore taken a job in a factory in Bitterfeld. As soon as he heard that an insurrection had broken out in Central Germany he had very cleverly organised the able-bodied workers in Bitterfeld and Holtzweisig, and he had led his little army to Ammendorf to join my troops. Tiemann was extremely courageous. He was never slack, and he was always an inspiration to the troops.

During the few days in which we fought together I had learned to love and respect Tiemann. He was a simple, courageous, and self-sacrificing proletarian. I was therefore all the more disappointed in the statements he made during my trial. He did not face the judge in court as bravely as he faced the *Sipo* in battle.

I was very depressed by the fact that a number of other comrades, apart from Tiemann, lost their nerve before the judge. I often thought about this fact while I was in prison. It seems to me that many

naturally brave proletarians remain courageous as long as they act in a group. When, however, they face a judge alone, they weaken, because they have unfortunately been taught that this representative of the law is their superior as far as knowledge and education are concerned.

Tiemann's well organised and well armed men had advanced from Bitterfeld to Gröbers, where they fought a victorious though terrible fight with the *Sipo*. The workers took four prisoners and captured two trench mortars and other arms and ammunition.

I learned from Josef Schneider that some of my men had fled to the Mansfeld district, where they were awaiting me. I decided to lead Tiemann's troops to Mansfeld. In order to avoid the *Sipo* and the regulars we were obliged to march in a roundabout way.

In Gröbers Josef Schneider was co-operating with a man named Keller, who was chief of the Press department. No one really knew to what party he belonged. Schneider apparently thought highly of Keller, though I warned him against this man a number of times.

Keller was a tall thin man with an unsteady gaze. He talked as though he were very radical, and made all kinds of fantastic suggestions to me. I declined to let him co-operate with me in my command of the troops, and he was obliged to be satisfied with a job as assistant to Josef Schneider, who was in charge of our finances and our commissariat.

During my trial in Moabit it became apparent

that my judgment of Keller had been correct, for he made false statements about me in court.

Later, after I was discharged from the prison in Sonnenburg, I went to Hanover, where I was welcomed by the workmen. At the station a man with a huge bouquet of flowers tried to take hold of my hand. He was sobbing hysterically, and said: 'Don't you know me? I am your friend Keller.' His hypocrisy was so revolting that I had to exert great self-control to refrain from striking him. On our march to the Mansfeld district we passed the village of Roitzschgen. It was here that the events on the Hess estate took place, which I shall describe later.

In Wettin we fought against the Citizen Guard in the streets. One of them was wounded, but we bandaged his wound and took him to hospital.

In Wettin the men were given their dinner and their wages. Then we marched on to Mansfeld. On this day Josef Schneider spent 30,000 marks, apart from the wages. This sum was paid to business men in Wettin for bread and meat, as well as for shoes and linen, which the men badly needed.

After it grew dark it was difficult for me to use my map. I was leading the troops, and it was my responsibility to see that we did not get lost. The cyclist messengers were riding between the first and the second waggons. One of the cyclists was holding on to my waggon and we were pulling him along. I told him to ask the name of the village through which we were passing, as I wanted to

know whether we were on the right route. Though I asked him several times he refused, on the grounds that the inhabitants would not have told the truth anyway. Then he suggested that I ask them myself. Thereupon I hit him and he hit me back. I jumped from the waggon and shook him. He excused himself by saying that he had not recognised me in the dark.

During the night from the 31st of March to the 1st of April we reached the village of Besenstedt, where we were going to rest. The worker-soldiers were quartered in the houses belonging to the three estates of the town. The largest estate was owned by Captain Nette. His manor house, which was built in 1914, had cost millions of marks. The cellars were crowded with hams, bacon and sausages, and all kinds of delicacies. This was at a time when the food shortage was acute in Germany. Some of the worker-soldiers were furious when they saw how much food was being stored on this estate.

To me it seemed wicked not to let the suffering workers have the benefit of this food. Eight of my men were busy from midnight until twelve o'clock in the morning carrying this food to the village inn, where we had established our headquarters. As it was, we left enough food in the cellars for these capitalists to be well fed for months. I ordered the food which we had requisitioned to be distributed among the population of the district and among the troops.

It was characteristic of a man like Nette that,

apart from a number of uniforms, he kept eighteen pairs of trousers and twenty military shirts in his cupboard. We requisitioned these clothes, as well as five dozen new shirts.

Later, when asked by the judge in Moabit what he had lost by our visit, Nette only mentioned the five dozen shirts. He did not mention the military shirts or trousers, because my counsel might have asked him how he came to own so much military equipment.

On Friday, the 1st of April, the bloody battle of Besenstedt took place. During the last forty-eight hours our situation had become worse. The fighting in Ammendorf and in the Leuna works had separated the workers' troops into small groups of not more than a few hundred each. The *Sipo* and regular troops were making every effort to prevent these groups from coming together. The *Sipo* had been strengthened by some South German contingents, and their artillery was very strong.

When we left Wettin I realised that our situation was hopeless. I thought of dismissing the troops. We could not get any orders from party headquarters. It would have been unwise to dismiss our troops in Besenstedt. The country was so flat that there was no place to hide our arms and ammunition. The Mansfeld district, where there were a number of mines and factories, would have been more suitable. I also had heard that a troop of comrades was marching to meet us, so I hoped to reach Mansfeld safely.

I thought that we might meet these comrades in a day's march. About noon we left Besenstedt, and made a last attempt to get through the cordon of *Sipo* and regulars, which was tightening round us. In about an hour I saw through my field glasses that we were approaching a line of police. They were about 3,000 yards away from us. We immediately set up our machine-guns behind a small embankment of the local railway. Soon afterwards shells and bullets began to drop in our midst. The workers' soldiers defended themselves with incredible courage, but our position was hopeless, as we lacked ammunition. Not one of us hoped to get out of this battle alive. More than twenty of our brave comrades sacrificed their lives. Others saved themselves only by jumping into the River Saale, which was behind us, and swimming or rowing away.

The battle of Besenstedt really represented the last flare up of the Central German insurrection. After this battle it would have been quite impossible to unite our forces again. The entire district in which the insurrection had taken place was like a huge camp of regulars and *Sipo*. It was extremely difficult for the scattered revolutionary troops to get out of the district.

After they had crossed the Saale the workers separated into groups of four or six men, but even bands as small as this were conspicuous, and we were forced to march on in two and threes. Comrade Tiemann, as well as another comrade who knew the

district, marched with me. The enemy was still shooting at us. We met a great many cyclist patrols and lorries filled with *Sipo* and regulars.

For five hours we marched across wet fields, avoiding the roads. At seven o'clock in the evening we approached the town of Koennern. When we were more than 2,000 yards away from the town we saw a group of *Sipo* men at a distance of about 400 yards. We hid in the ditch which ran through the field in which we were walking, and crawled along on all fours until our knees were bleeding. We had escaped the *Sipo*, and it was quite safe for us to return to the path. We hid our arms under the locks over a small river, as we wanted to pose as harmless wanderers. In Koennern we ran right into the arms of some militiamen from South Germany. When asked my name I said 'Reinhold König.' I was carrying papers in this name. They rushed us to the station, kicking us and striking us as we went, and here we found twenty workers who had already been arrested. I could not but compare the humanity of the workers with the cruelty and brutality of these monarchist soldiers. They wore new grey uniforms with silver badges, and steel helmets. They were armed with rifles, revolvers, and bludgeons.

They struck us prisoners with these bludgeons. As they did so they asked again and again, 'Well, where is your Hoelz?' They might easily have recognised me, as I was disguised only by my glasses.

A few hours later we were commanded to put our

hands up. Then we were marched on to the station platform and conducted into the train in groups of three or four. Four volunteers stood on guard over us. Each one of them held his revolver against the temples of his prisoner. We were frightfully maltreated on the journey. We reached Sangerhausen at about midnight. I felt sure that I would be recognised in this town, because hundreds of the inhabitants had seen me during our battle with the men who had come in the armoured train. From the moment of my arrest I gave up all hope of escaping alive. I was quite prepared to depart into the next world.

We were pushed roughly into the cellar of the station building. Fifty or sixty workers who had been arrested were already huddled in this dirty, smelly room. Their faces were so bloody and swollen that their eyes were barely visible. Some of them had swellings as large as a fist on their heads. Many of them, lying on the floor, looked as though they were dead.

An officer asked Comrade Tiemann what he had done in the Red army. He said: 'I was a company commander.' Whereupon a non-commissioned officer struck him in the chest with the butt of his rifle, so that Tiemann fell over backwards. I jumped up to protect him from further assaults. Then they all turned on me.

During the night *Sipo* men and volunteers came into the cellar continually. They showed their heroism by beating defenceless prisoners. They dug

their heels into the workers' faces, telling them to get up. Some of the workers were then dragged out of the cellar. Some of them returned; others did not.

After our fight with the men in the armoured train we had arrested a young man from Sangerhausen, who had been acting as a spy, and we had kept him under arrest for two days. He was the son of the local Nationalist leader, and a member of the Citizen Guard. This young man knew my face well. Now he was acting as an informer to the police. During the night he came into the cellar frequently with a number of policemen, held a light in front of the face of each prisoner, and said: 'I know Hoelz well, he hit me.' I do not understand how I passed unrecognised by him.

My comrades were more confident than I was myself that I would be discharged by the police. Anyone who could prove that he had not taken part in the insurrection had a chance of getting out of this torture chamber.

I promised my comrades to make every effort to release them, should I escape myself. On the second day I demanded that I be heard by the authorities. On Sunday, the 3rd of April, in the afternoon at three o'clock, Reinhold König was summoned. I assumed a very doleful expression. I knew that I was risking a good deal, but I had nothing to lose, and there was a possibility that I might win.

A railway carriage was being used as an office. When we entered, several officers and a police con-

stable were sitting at a long table. In a corner of the carriage I saw to my consternation the spy who claimed to know me so well. I was sure that he would simply say he knew I was Hoelz.

I gave up all hope. The spy looked at each of us closely as we were conducted into the train. When my turn came I complained about the bad treatment we were receiving, and about the fact that we had already been detained for two days. I declared that I had left Ammendorf on my bicycle on Friday morning to fetch some eggs from a farm. I claimed that at Besenstedt I had been held up by the shooting that was going on between the workmen and the police. I declared, furthermore, that the members of the Citizen Guard who had arrested me had taken the eggs and my bicycle. I said that I did not know why I had been arrested, but that I hoped they would tell me. I claimed that my arrest was a serious miscarriage of justice, and demanded my immediate release. I told them that my wife and children were very anxious about me, as they did not know what had happened to me.

One of the officials took down what I said, and I then signed the statement. They examined my papers, which were quite in order, very carefully: Reinhold König was alive, had three children, and paid his taxes regularly. I did not know where he actually was at that moment; I, at any rate, was here. Finally I was told that my arrest had been a mistake. The officer made some excuse, and I was released. I said, however, that I might again be arrested by

mistake unless they gave me some sort of a statement. Thereupon my complete innocence was officially recorded in a document they gave me.

I was again free, but the first step I took upon leaving the railway carriage might have been disastrous. It would only have been necessary for someone to shout: 'There goes Hoelz.' It was imperative for me to leave the district at once.

I ran along the railway lines, to avoid the roads. I quenched my thirst at a brook, where I also washed my hands and face for the first time in three days. My face, which I looked at in my pocket mirror, looked terrible. Now I realised why the spy and the others had not recognised me. Even my family could not possibly have known me.

I felt very sad and hopeless. I thought of the revolutionary workers and of my other comrades, who were still in the cellar. They were all so honest and loyal. Was it not perhaps cowardly of me to escape when they were still in this terrible plight? I realised, however, that I could not sacrifice my own liberty for the sake of this sentiment. I could be more useful to them if I myself were free. I had promised to do all I could for them and their families, and I was resolved to keep this promise.

When it grew dark I took a small local train for Nordhausen. From there I took a fast train for Berlin, where I arrived on Monday morning at about eight o'clock. The first news that I saw in the morning paper was that 'Hoelz has been discovered as the man who wanted to blow up the *Siegessäule*'.

The papers also reported that I had committed some other crimes near Berlin. They claimed, furthermore, that I was already in Berlin. As usual the police knew all about my whereabouts long before I knew about them myself. Including the Saxon reward a total reward of 185,000 marks was now being offered for my arrest.

Berlin had become very dangerous for me. My name had been misused frequently, which made it all the more risky for me to stay in Berlin.

I could not find any place to live. The comrades whom I asked were afraid to harbour me. I had not had a decent night's rest for weeks, and I had hoped to enjoy a good rest in Berlin in the home of some friend. I could not risk staying at an hotel. My papers were all issued over the name of König, and the Sangerhausen police were, by this time, probably looking for me under this name. I spent my first night in Berlin walking aimlessly through the streets. At four o'clock on the morning of the second night, I saw a light in a night-café in Charlottenburg. I was dead tired, and went into the café, which was almost empty, except for a few street girls and their cavaliers. I was extraordinarily happy when one of these girls asked me to come home with her. I had three hours' rest, but I left the house at seven in the morning. Then I tried again to find a place to stay with some comrades. A comrade took me to the flat of a foreign student. This kind soul was so frightened at having me there that he kept the door of his room locked all day,

lest his landlady might see me. When I made the slightest noise she pounded on the door, for she thought a thief had got into the room. I therefore left this place the following night. A street girl, whose advice I asked in my despair, secured some forged identification papers for me. With them I was able to rent a small room in a *pension* for foreigners.

I planned to leave Berlin as soon as I had made arrangements to provide for the families of the men who had been killed during the insurrection, and as soon as I had secured some legal protection for those who had been arrested. I discussed these arrangements with various comrades in positions of authority in the party.

During the insurrection a comrade, who was well known in the Communist Labour Party, had misused my name. While we had been fighting the Reichswehr and the *Sipo* he had conducted expropriations on a large scale, and had used my name in this connection. He was not the only one who had done this. He signed the receipts for the money he requisitioned with my name, saying that he was Hoelz. I know that this comrade acted from purely political motives, but I think that his conduct was not justified, because it is unrevolutionary not to take responsibility for individual actions of this kind.

When I heard that this 'Hoelz' was in Leipzig I sent a messenger to him, asking him to send the money he had requisitioned by my messenger or

to come with it himself. When he refused, I sent two reliable comrades to Leipzig to fetch him. In the flat of a comrade we then forced him to surrender the funds to the Communist Labour Party treasury.

On the 15th of April we planned to meet at a café in the Rankeplatz. One of the men who had been connected with these expropriations had embezzled some of the funds, and he was to make a statement to the other comrades. This man, who was a merchant and former officer, named Henke, had been recommended to me by a comrade, who had said that Henke was completely reliable.

We left the café at about ten o'clock in the evening. When we had walked about five steps eight or ten plain clothes men approached us, and shouted 'Hands up!' I had not held up my hands in Koenners or Sangerhausen, so I did not do it here, in the presence of these hunters of men. I did not care if they did shoot.

We were taken to police headquarters in motor cars. When we were being marched off to our cells, Henke wept and said that he was sorry for what he had done. He had arrived in Berlin that morning, and had reported that he was meeting me in the evening. Henke himself was dismissed in a few hours. He had been arrested only as a matter of form; his official passport as an officer protected him against any serious suspicion.

I was arrested just fourteen days after the end of the Central German insurrection. My arrest was not a surprise to me. I had expected it daily. It

was obvious that this time I would not be released so quickly. The strong feeling against me would undoubtedly persuade the authorities to be exceptionally severe.

I was not, however, particularly depressed immediately after my arrest.

I did not take the whole affair too seriously. I even hoped that my arrest might advertise the Communist cause.

During the night – I lay on my bunk dead tired – more than a dozen plain clothes men came into my cell. They made every effort to make me tell where I had been living during the last two weeks. I had resolved not to tell, as I was afraid that I would get the people who had harboured me into trouble. When, however, the plain clothes men insinuated that I had stolen some of the expropriated money, I was so angry that I threw the key of my trunk at them, and told them where I had been living.

There was one particularly objectionable individual among these detectives. This man took my keys and went off to my room. He was greatly disappointed not to find any money in my trunk, but he stole a pair of new shoes, a suit of clothes, a shaving outfit, and a number of other things.

The next morning I had my first experience of the torments in store for me during the following weeks and months. In the finger-print department I was treated with great brutality. It was difficult for me not to hit these unpleasant officials, who twisted my fingers and wrists as much as they could.

I was dragged into the presence of a number of police commissaries who questioned me closely. Hundreds of clerks and stenographers stood about the corridor staring at me.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRIAL

As I did not answer their questions the officials satisfied themselves with photographing me from every possible angle.

That evening a heavy guard conducted me from the police headquarters to the prison in Moabit.

After I had again been questioned by innumerable officials – this took several hours – I was finally conducted to my cell. I was told that this cell was reserved only for murderers, who were about to be executed.

There were triple bars in front of the little hole which was called a window, and which was much too high for any escape. The wooden bunk was as hard as stone. On it were some heavy iron rings to which the prisoners' chains were attached. The iron door in this cell had a special lock. In a hole in the wall, over the door, there was an electric light which was left burning all night, so that sleep was very difficult.

My nights were hell, for I am one of the people who cannot sleep except in a darkened room. I told the prison doctor and the prison governor about this, but they refused to turn out the light.

In the middle of the night I pushed the wooden stool into the hole in which the light was burning so that the cell was practically dark, and I was able to sleep. Very soon, however, I was awakened by the clattering of keys and a volley of oaths. Three warders were in my cell, and they took the stool out of its hole. As soon as they had left I put it back. They returned in a little while, took the stool out again and swore at me. All night long we played this silly game. In fact, it went on for weeks.

The day on which I arrived in Moabit I was to go before the examining magistrate. The warder who chained me for this interview was so brutal that my hands and wrists were terribly lacerated and bleeding. I tried to control myself, and asked the man, whose name was Radtke, whether he did not dislike treating his fellow men so brutally. 'If I had a man like you for a brother,' he said, 'I would have hanged myself long ago.' As he spoke he tightened the handcuffs until my wrists cracked, and the pain caused beads of perspiration to appear on my forehead. I was conducted along a passage to the room in which I was to be interrogated. We met an elderly warder, whom I asked to loosen the handcuffs, as the pain was unbearable. He agreed sardonically, and screwed them on even tighter.

As soon as I was brought before the examining magistrate I told him that I would say nothing at all until my handcuffs had been loosened. He said that I would be forced to answer his questions eventually, and had me sent back to my cell.

The next day this torture was renewed. I refused to leave the cell, as long as the handcuffs were round my wrists. The warder tried to drag me out of the cell, but I sat down on the floor and refused to move. But I had stepped from the frying pan into the fire, for two warders then grabbed hold of me – one by each foot – and dragged me along the stone corridor. As a result the seat of my trousers was almost worn through. I continued to refuse to answer any questions. After three weeks had passed my legal advisers finally succeeded in having my handcuffs removed.

Before his trial every prisoner has the 'undeserved' privilege of walking inside the high walls of the prison courtyard for twenty minutes every day. This is not exactly a pleasure, especially if, as happened in my case, the prisoner is forced to wear handcuffs during this exercise. The first time I went out into the courtyard I was so glad to breathe fresh air that I forgot the indignity of being forced to walk handcuffed. As soon as I remembered it I turned round and told the warders, who were following us with their pistols cocked, that I refused to walk unless they removed my handcuffs. I pointed out that the other prisoners were not handcuffed. As a result I was not permitted to leave my cell for weeks.

As soon as I had given my lawyers power of attorney my situation was somewhat improved. One of my lawyers, whose name was Hegewisch, was a member of the Communist Party. The other two,

Broh and Fraenkl, did not belong to it. They were, in fact, hostile to the party.

My mother, who had no sympathy with my politics, made the long journey to come and see me. She was my first and practically my only visitor, and though she suffered greatly because of my actions she never reproached me.

My comrades were afraid that I would be shot 'while trying to escape,' that is to say, that I would be simply shot down without a trial. They therefore planned to release me by a ruse, but at the last moment their plans were thwarted, because some of the leaders of the Communist Workers' Party, who had been entrusted with the organisation of the plan, absconded with the necessary funds.

During these weeks of strain James Broh was particularly kind to me. He took care of me in a most touching manner. He brought me books by Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Tagore, and other authors. Victor Fraenkl, too, did everything in his power to make my situation easier.

When Fraenkl and Broh succeeded in having my handcuffs removed, I went before the examining magistrate, Dr. Jaegar, without demur. I told him that I would answer questions at the trial only, and not during any preliminary hearings. Jaegar tried to dissuade me from this course, which, so he declared, would only do me harm. He said that it was not only his duty to put on record everything that had been charged against me, but also to collect material for my defence. He tried to make me believe

that I had been dropped by all my friends and comrades. He said that on my mother's account I should make a frank confession, for this would give me a chance of being pardoned.

When Jaegar found that these tactics made no impression on me, he changed his attitude completely. Thereafter he examined me daily. Hundreds of witnesses, who gave incriminating evidence against me, made statements before him. I was always present. Jaeger wrote down the minutes of these hearings himself. He asked me every few moments whether I had anything to say in my defence.

It would frequently have been easy for me to contradict the witnesses' false statements, but I had arranged with my lawyers not to say anything at all during the preliminary hearings.

These hearings were a terrible nervous strain. For several hours daily I was forced to sit still and listen to lies told by hysterical people. Many of them had not even seen me before.

Towards the end of April Jaegar was listening to a witness from Eisleben. Suddenly a constable came into the room, and whispered to Jaeger, so that I could hear what he said: 'A very important witness is waiting outside, he has been sent here from police headquarters.' Jaeger asked the witness whom he had been questioning to leave the room for a moment. A young man, who looked about seventeen years old, came in. He was wearing the trim uniform of a police cadet. Jaeger asked him whether he knew Hoelz, and whether he wanted to

make an incriminating statement. The young man, whose name was Franke, said that he did.

He said that in 1920 he had been serving with the Reichswehr. During the *Kapp-Putsch* he had been given leave to go to his home in the Vogtland, so that he could report to headquarters what the workers were doing there. He said that when he arrived Hoelz and the Communists were already in power. His wife had asked him to join the Communist movement. He had refused, whereupon she had divorced him.

Jaeger looked disappointed, and when Franke stopped speaking he asked him whether he had nothing else to say. 'What has that to do with Hoelz?' Jaeger asked, 'That is not incriminating evidence.' Franke replied: 'That is all, but if Hoelz had not been in power in the Vogtland my wife would not have divorced me.' Jaeger was relieved when this young man had left the room.

Another witness stated that he had seen me shoot an officer in Hamburg in November, 1918. I had never been in Hamburg.

Hundreds of 'incriminating' witnesses appeared before the magistrate, for the Socialist Chief of Police in Berlin, Richter, had publicly offered a reward of 50,000 marks to any witnesses who gave important evidence against me.

On the 7th of May I was confronted with a witness, named Frau Hess, for the first time. She was the wife of an estate owner who had been shot during the Central German insurrection.

That morning I was conducted to the examining room at an early hour. In the corridor I saw several civilians. Among them was a woman dressed in mourning, and wearing a veil. As soon as I had been taken into the room, the prosecution summoned the witnesses.

The lady in black came in, slowly throwing back her veil and holding up her arms. She began to sob hysterically, pointed at me, and cried: 'That is my husband's murderer.'

I was surprised; I did not know whether this was a theatrical scene or a misunderstanding. I had not shot Hess, nor had I issued any order to have him shot. I had never had anything to do with him.

The public prosecutor tried to soothe and comfort the woman. He promised her that her husband's murderer would be punished. Then he asked her to sit down at the table. Frau Hess sat where she could see my face distinctly. The public prosecutor then asked her whether she was certain that I was the man who had killed her husband. He asked her to look at me closely.

I was told to walk about the room, so that Frau Hess could study my walk and my general appearance. Then I was told to speak, so that she could hear my voice. The woman looked at me for more than half an hour. In the meantime she had grown more quiet. Then she began to make her statement.

In a quiet voice she described the events leading up to her husband's death. Then the public prosecutor asked her: 'Tell me, Frau Hess, is Hoelz

the man who killed your husband?' Then she answered: 'I cannot say definitely that it was Hoelz who killed him.'

The public prosecutor was horrified at this unexpected answer. He said to her: 'Frau Hess, I can understand that, at the moment, you may not be able to recall events exactly. You may withdraw the statement you have made to-day at any time. You can make another statement before me whenever you wish.'

Three days later this woman made a statement in Halle, according to which she claimed to have seen me shoot her husband. She also said that I had told my men to fire three more shots at him. Altogether Frau Hess made four contradictory statements. Actually Hess's death occurred in the following manner:

At about four o'clock on the afternoon of Wednesday the 30th of March the worker-soldiers left Gröbers and marched towards Mansfeld, where they were going to meet their comrades. Gerhard Tiemann, who had organised these troops in Bitterfeld and Holtzwessig, was in command.

On the way these worker-soldiers requisitioned about five waggons and four teams of horses. Most of the workers were wearing old threadbare suits of clothes. I therefore decided to send a waggon on ahead to requisition some farm clothing from the estates in the district. Without any serious friction we soon acquired a few dozen overcoats from the various estate owners.

We marched through seven or eight villages. When we reached the village of Roitzschgen one of my men, who had been in charge of the requisitioning of these overcoats, told me that there had been trouble with an estate owner named Hess who refused to give up his coats. Hess had refused to let my men into his house. Twenty or thirty of the worker-soldiers therefore climbed over the gateway and forced their way into the house.

There was so much noise in the house that I went in to see what all the racket was about. I could not imagine why there could be so much uproar about a few overcoats. I found about fifteen or twenty men on the ground floor of the house. They were quarrelling with Hess, who stood in their midst. A few of the men were trying to negotiate with him quite peacefully. Hess's attitude, however, made this quite impossible. He seemed unsure of himself, and contradicted himself continually. No one knew what he really wanted. One moment he said that he would give us the coats, and the next he refused to do so.

I tried to get through the group of men round Hess, but there was such confusion that someone struck my right hand with a hard object by mistake. My thumb was badly injured, and I was unable to reach Hess. I was unable also to make myself heard, as most of the worker-soldiers did not know who I was. I had joined their particular troop only a few hours before.

The crowd was forcing its way into the front part

of the house. Hess declared that he must fetch the key to the store-room in which the coats were kept. I was carried along with the crowd. Then I heard someone calling my name; it was one of the messengers.

I went out into the courtyard to speak to him. Then I suddenly heard a shot. I thought it had been fired by one of the men in the road, and I called: 'Do not shoot.' Then I reprimanded the men for unwarranted shooting. Almost at once I heard a volley of shots, and about twenty or thirty men rushed out into the road from the house.

I now heard that Hess had fled into the back garden, where he was shot by the Red soldiers because he had threatened them with a revolver. The whole incident from the time I entered the house until the last shot had not taken more than a few minutes. Everything had happened so quickly that most of the men did not know what had occurred.

I immediately asked some of the workers to tell me exactly what had happened. Their reports were not the same. Some of them declared that Hess had been the first to shoot. Others said that Hess had only threatened them with his revolver.

At the hearing, a maid, who had been in service with the Hess family, said that after all the men had left the estate, a worker had returned and looked at Hess's dead body. According to the maid the worker had said: 'If you had not fired the first shot this would not have happened.'

There were a number of men on the estate who were not members of the Red Army. The inhabitants of the village stated that Hess, who was an ex-officer, had played a very reactionary and unpopular role during the *Kapp-Putsch*. It was therefore only to be expected that a sharp controversy would occur on his estate. He had been frightened by the presence of several men whom he knew, and who did not belong to the Red army.

Even the court admitted that the members of the Red army had not shot Hess with malice aforethought.

When the preliminary hearings were finished, the day for the trial was decided upon so quickly that my lawyers barely had time to prepare for it. I was, of course, looking forward to the trial with intense interest. I would then have an opportunity to speak.

More than three fourths of the incriminating evidence brought out during the preliminary hearings had to be scrapped, as it had been proved to be false. I could only be accused of the actions I had actually committed, and which I was quite willing to confess – high treason, breaches of the peace, requisitioning of goods, taking hostages, bombing railway tracks, etc. I was quite sure of myself, but I counted on being sentenced to several years of imprisonment.

I did not realise how serious the situation was until the trial opened. Then I appreciated my lawyers' anxiety. They were afraid that I might

be sentenced to death. It was quite obvious that the court and the prosecution would do all in their power to incriminate me. Most prisoners are permitted to wear civilian clothes during their trials. I, however, was forced to wear prison garb. I was not even given a pair of shoes to wear. Instead I was forced to appear in court in some leather slippers, of which one was a woman's slipper, while the other was much too large for me. My trousers were far too large, and the prison jacket they gave me was buttonless. My entrance into court caused some amusement to the *bourgeois* journalists and curiosity-mongers who had come to enjoy a trial.

A portrait of some monarch or other hung on the wall behind the judge's table. In my agitation during the next few days I wanted to throw an inkwell, which had been standing on the table used by my lawyers, at this portrait, but Fraenkl did not think this was a wise thing to do. When I had realised that the court was determined to sentence me for the shooting of Hess as well as for a number of other crimes which I had not committed, I could no longer take the proceedings seriously.

The trial began with a statement concerning my life and record. The representatives of the *bourgeois* Press were shocked to hear that I had never been prosecuted before. When asked about my family, I refused to answer, for they had had nothing whatever to do with the Central German insurrection. I said, furthermore, that I did not consider myself

as a defendant, that, on the contrary I was accusing the court and *bourgeois* society in general of misconduct. I said that I was willing to make a statement only so that the workers would know what my motives had been.

During the preliminary hearings I had thought that my statement during the trial would easily refute the false statements that had been made against me. Now I realised that evidence, whether true or false, had little to do with the matter, for the court had obviously made up its mind beforehand what attitude to adopt.

It was impossible for any witness to appear in my defence. Anyone trying to do so was at once accused of having taken part in the insurrection. Dr. Kopp, the famous criminal lawyer, offered to make a statement concerning the reliability of Frau Hess's evidence. He stated that, as the wife of the man who had been shot, her evidence might not be quite clear. Kopp was refused a hearing. My lawyers, too, were quite unable to make the statements they had prepared.

The trial lasted about fourteen days. All of my lawyers could not be present all the time, as they were, of course, conducting other political cases. Five thousand workers and comrades had been summoned before the Central German and Berlin courts at this time.

The hatred against me grew daily. The *bourgeois* Press made much of the crimes which I was supposed to have committed. Every day, on my way to the

court room, I met warders and assistant warders on the staircases and in the corridors. Many of them kicked me as I passed. They were sure that I would be executed, and they considered even this too humane a punishment for me. They thought it was their duty to punish me, and I realised from their kicks how the hatred against me was growing.

The public prosecutor argued with me, saying that it would be easy for us to win everyone for the Communist cause by peaceful means. I tried to show them that it would be impossible to attain this end by peaceful means. I gave them simple examples. I pointed out, for instance, that the censorship of the written word alone would make this peaceful persuasion impossible. If I am standing on the seashore, I told them, and see a sinking ship, I must save the passengers. If I do not own a lifeboat myself and notice a pleasure boat near by, I must take the pleasure boat (if necessary by force) and save my fellow men. There is only one way to put an end to human suffering, and that is Socialism. And Socialism can only be realised after the *bourgeoisie* has been beaten by the working classes.

The judges tried to prove that I included everyone who did not work with his hands, everyone, in fact, who did not agree with me, amongst the *bourgeoisie*. They knew quite well, however, that I referred only to those parasites who get a living from the work of others. Actually I did not even include these judges themselves amongst the *bourgeoisie*. I considered them as the type of petty-

bourgeoisie who carry out the suppression of the working class on behalf of the *bourgeoisie* itself.

It was quite impossible to discuss world problems with these judges. I did so only because I hoped that, through the Press, the workers outside would hear what I had said. This was necessary, as the Social-democrats had been agitating against me among the workers.

I was particularly distressed when Heinrich Brandler, who was being tried at the same time, declared in the presence of his judges that the Communists' aims could, at times, be achieved by peaceful means. Brandler's unrevolutionary attitude was, of course, a great help to Jaeger. He emphasised again and again that I had nothing to do with the Communist movement, and that even the party leader had claimed that force was not necessary to realise our aims.

It was understandable during these difficult times that the Communist party headquarters did not altogether stand up for me, even though I had acted according to their orders throughout the Central German insurrection. It was inexcusable, however, that the leader of the only revolutionary party in Germany should, through his statement to the judge, have let down the five thousand workers who were being tried at the same time. Brandler's action caused me to feel utterly deserted. I found it difficult to keep my nerve.

I considered it my duty to defend all the comrades who were being tried. It was my duty, furthermore,

to defend even those, who, like Schneider, had been able to escape.

A number of witnesses gave the judge receipts for money, signed with my name. The witnesses declared that Hoelz himself had given them these receipts, but that it was another Hoelz. The judge admitted that these receipts did not bear my signature. I was furious with Plaettner, who had been responsible for these receipts, but I did not mention his name.

It was impossible for me to take the proceedings seriously any longer. I therefore made fun of the court and the witnesses, who were all parasites on human society.

When Hess's death was being discussed I pulled myself together for a last effort. I knew that the workers who had actually shot the man were safe. For this reason it was not necessary for me to take the blame myself for an act which I had not committed. Personally, I did not care whether the court or *bourgeois* society generally considered me a murderer. During every revolutionary struggle one is always confronted with death; either one may be killed oneself, or one may be forced to kill the enemy.

In my opinion it is the duty of every man to try to prevent unnecessary bloodshed. We Communists are only people who are consistently trying to abolish exploitation and unnecessary bloodshed among mankind. This aim cannot be attained, furthermore, by talk and Christian preaching; it

can be attained only by removing the cause which is the root of the evil.

I was accused of killing an enemy, whom I had not killed, merely because an excuse was wanted to condemn me to death. None of the judges took any notice of the fact that the *Sipo* and the regulars, too, had murdered a great many defenceless workers. These 'defenders of law and order' had killed six family men, who had not taken part in the insurrection at all, near Schraplau. These were only a few of the workers who were killed during the insurrection.

It was Jaeger's ambition to prove that we used the lorries, on which the hostages had been transported, as barricades. Actually, these lorries were always driven out of the range of the firing. The hostages, including the Mayor of Sangerhausen and the vicar, stated that the *Sipo* had aimed at these lorries, and that it was they who had shot a number of hostages.

The Moabit court decided that Hess had not been shot with malice aforethought. The following statement appeared in my own sentence: 'The events on the estate go to prove that he was not wilfully shot.'

The fact that seventy-two workers had been shot, on the other hand – this was proved during the parliamentary committee's investigations – was wilful murder. During the insurrection the workers held hostages from the *Sipo*, the regulars, and the Citizen Guard, but not one of these hostages

was shot. We workers felt only contempt for the shooting of defenceless prisoners. Only when it was absolutely necessary did we even strike our prisoners. I hit three prisoners myself.

It was, of course, necessary for us to make our authority felt. We issued proclamations stating that citizens who disobeyed our orders would be severely punished (that they would be shot or punished in some other way). Despite these warnings we often met with stubborn resistance. In such cases, however, we only inflicted light punishments such as hitting our opponents.

I should doubt whether, after their experiences in Central Germany, the workers will be as humane in future insurrections. The revolutionary workers have learned by bitter experience from their enemies that humanity may not be worth while. As a rule the workers' actions are directed by their humane emotions. Their enemies, on the other hand, are usually more hard-headed; they consider sentiment as soft and womanish. Naturally there are exceptions to this rule, but on the whole the events since 1918 have shown which of the opponents in the class war is the more humane.

Though Jaeger stated in his accusation that the killing of Hess was a 'dark and doubtful case,' he nevertheless urged the court to sentence me to death.

My lawyers and I had expected this sentence. I had grown accustomed to the idea of being shot. My only wish was to summon up sufficient strength and courage after those trying weeks, so that I could

face the firing squad as fearlessly as I had fought in the revolutionary battles. I wanted my death to benefit the Communist cause.

After the prosecuting attorney had finished his speech and my counsel had spoken for the last time, it was with relief that I once more summarised my whole case myself. I was able to express all my contempt for the judges and the court in this last defence. 'The day of liberty and revenge will dawn,' I concluded, 'then *we* shall be the judges. Justice is a whore, and you, the judges, are her pimps.'

I was dragged out of the court room. The warders struck at me. Sentence had been passed. Imprisonment for life!

CHAPTER IX

PRISON

I DID not appreciate until later what the words 'imprisonment for life' really meant. At first I was not terribly upset by the sentence. I was sure that I could prove that there had been a mistake, for I had nothing to do with the shooting of Hess. I knew, too, that I was innocent of many of the other crimes for which I had been sentenced. I felt certain, therefore, that the life sentence would eventually be reduced to a limited number of years. I wondered whether I should be left in the detention prison in Moabit or whether I would be sent to a regular prison.

It would have been better for me to stay in Berlin, where I could consult with my lawyers.

The day after sentence had been passed I realised that I was no longer to be given any rights at all. Broh, who came to see me, was not permitted to talk to me alone, whereas before the trial we had conferred together without supervision. The same day the governor of the prison, as well as the so-called 'inspector of labour,' came to my cell, and told me that henceforth I would not be permitted to receive books or newspapers, and that I would be forced

to perform manual labour. I had to paste paper bags.

After my books and newspapers had been removed I tried to pass the time by pasting bags. I pasted ten hours a day. I pasted and pasted and pasted until I was quite stupefied and could hardly think.

It is difficult to explain the agony of pasting bags ten hours a day without any relaxation such as books and newspapers. Three times a day I was given a so-called meal which consisted of a few spoonfuls of tasteless soup. I was not permitted to speak to anyone, and the maximum wages for ten hours pasting was eight pfennige, four of which were handed out to the prisoner himself. In the end I threw the glue pot and the table at the inspector of labour, and refused to work.

As a result I was punished in the usual way: I was not permitted to have a daily walk in the courtyard, and my bed was taken out of the cell.

I remained in Moabit until the 13th of July. In the night of the 14th, ten or twelve men came suddenly into my cell. 'Get ready,' they said, 'you are going to be transported to a convict prison.' When I asked to which one I was being taken they said they were not allowed to tell me.

I dressed and left my cell, accompanied by these men. I was still half asleep. One of the men had a decent human face, this was my lawyer Broh. It had cost him a great effort to be present when I was taken to the convict prison, for he wanted to prevent my being 'shot while trying to escape,' as Karl

Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Jogisches, Sylt, Paasche, and many others had been shot.

Three motor cars stood in the prison courtyard. Around them stood a number of plain clothes men. The warders pushed me into one of these motor cars, and before I realised what had happened an iron chain about three yards long and thirty pounds in weight had been fastened to my leg. Then the motor cars moved swiftly towards a prison which was unknown to me.

A police commissioner, my lawyer, and Dr. Jaeger, who had said that I ought to be sentenced to death, drove with me. Jaeger had told my mother, who had come to see me shortly before the trial, that he was sure I had not shot Hess. Now he tried to ingratiate himself with me, so that I would tell him what some of the prominent members of the party had been doing during the insurrection. He went so far as to offer me some red wine. He had brought a bottle from his own cellar. He pretended to be very friendly, hoping that I would talk.

When he saw that the wine had no effect, he began to show me photographs of his wife and children. Then he said that really he had saved my life, for he could have had me sentenced to death. His next move was to tell me about the executions which he had witnessed. It was terrible to listen to this sadist's talk.

While he was talking in this repulsive manner the motor cars had left the outskirts of Berlin, and

were driving through a district which I did not know. My lawyer told me that we were approaching Magdeburg.

On the outskirts of the city we were met by some plain-clothes men in a fourth motor car. They drove with us round the outskirts, so that we should not pass through the centre of the town. We drove from two in the morning until nine at night at a great speed. We stopped only once, for a short time. Not until we reached Hamm in Westphalia did they tell me that we were driving to Münster. Dr. Jaeger told me that I would be safest in this town, for the inhabitants were all devout Roman Catholics, and no Communists lived there. Luckily no people were run over during our fast drive; we did, however, run over a goose, a chicken, and a dog.

Villages, fields and woods seemed to fly past, and after having been in a prison cell for four months, I enjoyed these sights enormously. On this day I greeted freedom and took leave of it at the same time. How long would I be in prison? I hoped to be free in a year and a half. If anyone had told me that I should be in prison for eight years I do not think I would have entered it alive. We reached Münster in Westphalia in the evening.

I cannot describe what I felt when our motor cars drove through the heavy prison gates. The building itself was gloomy and uncanny. In the distance the tiny windows of the cells looked even smaller than they really were.

A number of officials, some in uniform and some in mufti, came out of the administration building to meet us. One of them was the governor of the prison. I had thought that the governor of a convict prison must be an old, embittered man. When I noticed that this man had a childlike face and an even more childlike expression, I felt suddenly hopeful. He did not look like a sadist. I thought I should get on well with him. He greeted me with reserve, but in just as detached a manner as he greeted the others.

Dragging the heavy chain behind me I was conducted through long corridors to the part of the prison where the cells were situated. When the heavy iron door separating the cells from the rest of the building was closed, I felt completely hopeless. It was almost entirely dark, and only a few little oil lamps lit our way. From the tower in the centre of the building rows of cells seemed to radiate.

We ascended an iron staircase. When we reached the third floor the warder, who was conducting me, opened the door to a cell and told me that it was mine. He said that the third motor car, in which the official who had the key to my chains was driving, had not yet arrived, and that for this reason I should have to remain chained until morning. I said that this would be impossible, for I could not lie down until the chain was removed. So the warder brought a hammer and a file, and worked for half an hour before the chains dropped off my leg.

The warders left without speaking. I was alone in my cell. I looked around. It was dark, except for the reflection of a gas light which stood in the prison courtyard. My cell was a small whitewashed hole. There was a wooden table and a small cupboard, as well as an iron bedstead and the inevitable iron bucket, in the cell. This was to be my bedroom, dining-room, sitting-room, and lavatory. It was so small that I could only walk three steps one way and two steps the other. In the courtyard below the night watchman was walking up and down. Otherwise not a sound was to be heard, though, as I was told next day, 800 prisoners were housed in the prison.

As soon as the warders had left me I collapsed. I felt as though my heart would stop beating, and I thought only of the words 'for life.' All my hopes of being free in a short time left me. I flung myself on to the iron bed and forced myself to close my eyes. I had spent four months in prison in Czechoslovakia, and as long in a 'murderer's' cell in Moabit, but I had never experienced the same kind of depression as I did during these first nights of my life-sentence. The excitement of the trial had prevented me from being depressed in Moabit.

I had often discussed the possibility of solitary confinement with my friends, and they had said that they did not believe that I would be able to stand it. I had said that I did not agree, as, by temperament, I liked being alone. I thought of these conversations as I lay sleepless on my iron bed.

Early in the morning a penetrating ring, followed by a terrific uproar, seemed to shake the building. The contrast to the dead silence of the night was so great that it came as a shock, and I could not imagine what the noise was about. In a few days I found out.

As soon as the prisoners have been awakened by the bell, the warders open the cells of the prisoners who, because of their good conduct, are allowed to sweep the stairs, empty the buckets, and distribute the food and water. These prisoners, who are called *Kalfaktoren*, are permitted to remain outside their cells most of the day.

The prisoners begin their day's work by pushing back the iron bars at the locks of the other prisoners' cells. It takes two men to push back these bars, and the noise is terrific, especially as it is intensified by the hollow reverberations of the building.

As soon as the door to his cell has been opened each prisoner must hold his slop bucket in readiness, so that it can be placed outside the door, and he can receive his clothes, his shoes, and his knife and fork. Then the doors are locked again.

The slop buckets are emptied and returned to the cells, which are again opened. Then the prisoners place their jugs outside the door, to be filled with water. Then the doors are locked again. Finally, when they are opened for the last time, the prisoner lifts the jug of water into his cell. At the same time he is given his so-called 'breakfast.' A large tin bucket, filled with an indefinable brown liquid, and

a big basket of bread, are carried from cell to cell by the *Kalfaktoren*.

When I had finished my first prison breakfast, the 'House Father,' whose function it is to see that the prisoners have proper clothing and clean linen, came to see me. He conducted me to the room where the prison clothes are kept. It smelt of camphor. I was told to undress. My Moabit prison garb was exchanged for the brown clothes worn by convicts. My entire body was searched for small saws or other sharp objects.

I had hardly returned to my new cell, when another warder arrived, who conducted me to the prison doctor. A number of other convicts – some had only arrived the day before – were already waiting for the doctor. We were all told to stand with our faces towards the wall. It was strictly forbidden to move our heads or to exchange a word with the next man, who stood only five yards away.

The doctor asked me whether I was ill, but he went on talking with the male nurse and did not give me an opportunity to answer. I was conducted back to my cell. Almost at once a warder appeared, who said that the governor wanted to see me.

A few minutes later I stood opposite the man who had impressed me so favourably the evening before. He told me that he had once been a prosecuting attorney, and that during the war he had served as a captain of artillery. He said that if I conducted myself well and worked hard I would find my sentence less irksome. He told me that some of the

prisoners had been in the prison for twenty years, and that they felt quite comfortable there. He said that if my conduct were good I might be pardoned in fifteen to twenty years. The governor, like the doctor, did not give me a chance to answer. He merely made his little routine speech, and I was back in my cell again before I had time to think.

When I returned to my cell the labour inspector was waiting for me. He explained the schedule of labour in the prison. There were several jobs to choose from: pasting bags, oakum picking, and punching metal buttons or nails. He said that I could also learn a trade, such as carpentering. I asked him whether this meant that I could work outside my cell. He said no, that I must remain in my cell in any case. After my experiences in Moabit I felt somewhat inclined to refuse any kind of work, but I realised that I must have something to do, for I should lose my mind in solitary confinement.

I asked the inspector to give me the work which would pay the most, so that I could send money to my wife and my parents. He said that if I learned carpentering I should not earn anything for the first few months. Other occupations paid eight pfennige a day, four of which would be paid out to me. He concluded by saying that at the moment there was not enough work for all the prisoners, as the prison was overcrowded.

By the time he left my cell it was noon, and the *Kalfaktoren* brought around our dinner, consisting of a bean stew, in big buckets. As I do not dislike

beans the prison food seemed quite bearable to me during the first few months.

After dinner a little old man, dressed in civilian clothes, came to my cell. It appeared that he was the prison teacher, whose job it was to give each prisoner a book every week. He gave me a silly novel, which I read through three or four times a day, so that I should not have so much time to think.

In the evening we were given a repulsive water soup, which might have been made from the water used to rinse the food buckets at noon.

A few minutes after the soup had been distributed there was a sharp ring, which meant that the prisoners were to get undressed. The warder had told me that the prisoners' clothes had to be placed outside the cells at night. This procedure, which seemed to me most undignified, was to prevent the prisoners from attempting to escape.

Immediately after 'supper' the prisoners were ordered to undress and to lie down on their iron beds. The warders leave the prison at seven o'clock and the night watchmen come on duty.

The prisoners are then condemned to lie on their cots until seven in the morning. This is far worse than it sounds. Many people who have their freedom would, no doubt, be grateful for twelve hours' sleep, but twelve hours on a hard iron bed in prison are quite different from the sleep of a free man. Though the air in the cells is so bad that it should make one drowsy, it is impossible to go to sleep. Often

prisoners lie awake half the night. In the morning, dressed in a shirt that hardly falls below the waist, the prisoners must go outside their cell and pick up their clothes.

On the second day of my imprisonment forty other prisoners and I were taken out into the yard for half an hour's walk. We were walked round in a circle. This exercise was called our 'hour's rest,' and it was, indeed, our only chance of breathing fresh air and seeing a spot of sky. A shed, in which boards were kept, stood in the centre of the courtyard, so that there was little room for us to walk. The courtyard was completely bare, not a tree or a wisp of green was visible anywhere.

It is terrible for grown men to walk round in a circle. A space of five feet separated us from each other, and the warders watched us carefully, so that we should not exchange a word. The prisoners, however, develop a kind of language of gestures.

In the courtyard I forgot my own misery. I looked at the other men closely. I did not know how long they had been there, nor what crime they had committed to be condemned to live in this coffin-like place.

The man walking ahead of me interested me. I did not know how old he could be. He was thin, and bent, and his steps were slow and dragging. I could see his face for moments at a time when we turned. He looked at me shyly and bitterly. One look at his sad eyes made them unforgettable. His hair was white, but his face was quite youthful.

When we were returning to our cells, I tried to find out something about this man. At this point the prisoners move more closely together, and the warders cannot watch them as carefully. The man behind me said: 'You are new; where do you come from?' I did not answer his question, but asked: 'How long has the man in front of me been here?' 'He's been sentenced to five years. Perjury. He's been here half the time. He's twenty-three years old.'

The thought of this young man haunted me. Five years seemed a very long time. Whenever I saw him thereafter I felt that he would never leave the prison alive. He looked like a man who was slowly walking towards his grave, and who was not interested in anything else.

Only during this half-hour's exercise did I see other human beings. I did not attend the prison church on Sundays. I was not admitted to the prison school, as prisoners over twenty-five were excluded. Though this walk in the courtyard was so undignified, I looked forward to it for twenty-three hours a day.

The bad effects of prison life became apparent in my case in a very few weeks. The lack of fresh air was terrible. I grew so weak that I nearly fainted every time I bent to tie my shoestrings. Gradually I began to dread the walk in the courtyard, because it was so exhausting. I always had a headache when I got back to my cell. I felt as though my head were being screwed together by force.

The work which was later assigned to me – pasting bags – was no relief. The nights were terrible. I could not sleep for an hour without waking up. The doctor, who examined me hurriedly, said that my condition was not at all serious. Now I could hardly bring myself to read my library book at all. In the evening one could not read as the cells were unlighted.

To try to forget my pains I began reciting verses by Herwegh, Freiligrath, and Erich Mühsam. This was a considerable relief.

The warders did not approve of my recitations. One night, when I was reciting, four of them came into my cell and told me to come out. I suspected no good, and refused. They locked the door and went away. In a little while they returned, and dragged me out of the cell by force. I was barefooted and had nothing on but my thin shirt. Two of them twisted my arms. The others struck me; one of them hit my head with his bunch of keys, while the other struck my back with his rifle. They kicked my shins and dragged me down to the ground floor. I told them not to treat me so brutally. In reply one of them gripped my neck so that I could no longer speak. He said: ‘Now, you dog, you are quiet at last.’ I was bleeding profusely.

Then they dragged me out of the main building and into the courtyard of the hospital building. Some of the prisoners in the cells of the main building were yelling because I was being maltreated. The warders were not disturbed by this

commotion. They kicked me into the hospital, where I was struck again by the hospital warders. Then they threw me into a padded cell. My shirt was in tatters.

This cell, which, as I learned later, was called the 'Torture Chamber' by the prisoners, was in the basement and very cold. It was smaller than the usual cells, and did not even contain a blanket.

My teeth chattered, and despite my wounds I tried to move about to keep warm. This running about in the tiny space made me dizzy, but when I tried to sit down I could not bear the cold. The smell was terrible, for there was no lavatory bucket, and the floor of the cell had been used instead.

Three hours later I heard a slight noise. Then I saw an eye at the little hole in the door. I thought this must be the night watchman. I asked him to take me out of this terrible cell, or at least to give me a blanket. 'Go and hang yourself,' he said, 'In Munich you pierced the eyes of sixteen warders.' As a matter of fact I had never been in Munich, nor had I ever maltreated any warders. I realised then how these people had been stirred up against me.

This night in the torture chamber of the Münster prison was the worst night of my life. Something broke in me. If I had had any doubts as to the necessity of smashing the present order of society, these disappeared during this terrible night.

The actual ill-treatment inflicted upon me by the warders was not so bad as the helpless feeling it gave one to be in this cell. No one who has not

experienced its torture can know what it means.

In the morning a warder came and brought me a cardboard bowl filled with the usual brown liquid made of chicory. When I noticed that someone had spat into this bowl I did not drink it, though I was yearning for something hot.

A few hours later a warder came with the prison doctor. He hardly looked at me, and when I told him how I had been treated he said that it was none of his business. I asked him to send me back to my regular cell, but he left without answering me. At noon the warder brought me some porridge, which I had to eat with my hands. I asked the warder to tell the governor that I wanted to complain about the treatment I had received, but the governor did not send for me. During the following day the warders gave me a pair of trousers and a filthy mattress.

The next day another doctor came to see me. This was Dr. Toebben, the chief prison doctor, who was also a professor of medicine at Münster University. He did nothing at all to relieve my suffering. On the fourth day I lost all hope of relief. My resistance was completely broken. I resolved to sever an artery the next night, as I feared I would go out of my mind. That evening, however, I was taken back to my own cell. I learned later that Professor Toebben had made a great effort to persuade the governor to have me returned to my cell.

The result of this terrible experience was that I suffered a severe nervous breakdown. My head

ached so terribly that I thought I should go out of my mind, and I began to weep at the slightest provocation. I was in such a state that I attempted to hang myself in my cell. When the warder discovered me and cut me down I had already lost consciousness. When I recovered, I was told that I would be chained and sent to a detention cell at once. It seemed incredible that I was to be punished for having attempted to shorten my agony. When the inspector realised that I would not allow myself to be chained, except by force, he gave up this plan. I knew that if they put me into chains, I would manage to take my life somehow.

Several days later, I was at last taken to see the governor. Despite the prison rules, which stipulated that prisoners could see him upon application, he had not sent for me before. When I told him that I wanted to complain about the bad treatment I had suffered at the hands of the warders, he said that he did not believe me, and that my nerves must have been so bad that I imagined things. If, however, I had really been beaten by the warders, he refused to do anything about it.

Some of my fellow prisoners, who had witnessed the abuses I had suffered, managed to convey the news to the world outside. It was reported in the left-wing newspapers. My lawyers heard about it, and Broh, who was a great friend of mine, came to Münster by aeroplane, to investigate these reports on the spot. The party sent Hegewisch, one of the party lawyers, to see me. The governor of the prison

denied that I had been maltreated. I was called to the governor's room, while he was consulting with my lawyers, and I simply undressed there and then, and showed them the bruises which were still visible on my back, although the incident had occurred two weeks before. Then the governor claimed that I had inflicted these bruises myself.

The warders, too, denied that there had been any kind of ill treatment, and my official complaint was therefore ignored, even though a number of my fellow prisoners had sworn what they had seen.

My brother and my mother were the only members of my family who came to see me during the first year of my imprisonment. My wife Clara did not come to see me until later. The prison governor censored or kept many of the letters that I wrote to my lawyers. The prison rules prescribed that prisoners were to be informed if any of their letters were not sent, but the governor usually ignored this rule in my case.

On the 8th of March my lawyer, Dr. Fraenkl, informed the Press that he had received a letter from me dated February 10th. The prison governor, so Fraenkl wrote to the Press, claimed that the delay was due to an oversight, and that my letters of January 9th and February 5th had not been sent, because they contained 'untruths and libellous statements.' This one letter which Fraenkl mentioned had taken seventeen days to reach Berlin. This meant a serious loss to me, as my clothes, shoes, and

other personal possessions were to be publicly auctioned to help defray the costs of the trial and, unless I wrote within a week, I could raise no legal objections to this procedure. Many of my letters – even the most personal and unpolitical ones – were frequently delayed in this manner. As it was only possible, furthermore, for prisoners to obtain writing paper and envelopes every Tuesday, this meant further delay. I was not even permitted to mention in my letters if I felt ill, or how the food was agreeing with me. When I remonstrated with the prison governor for delaying my letters, he was very cynical, and said there were ways in which he could discipline me. I was so angry – realising that he was a sadist in spite of the childlike smile – that I spat at him and struck him.

As a result of my behaviour I was again taken to the ‘torture cell.’ The next morning Professor Toebben came to see me again. I was lying on the floor on the filthy mattress when he came. This time I was not so depressed as I had been during my last confinement in this cell, for I had begun to think out a method of defence. Toebben, who was a large, fat man, leaned over and said: ‘Well, Hoelz, how are you?’ I folded my hands over my chest and said: ‘I am feeling better, Professor, I have begun to pray again.’

Professor Toebben was evidently surprised, and said: ‘Well, well!’ His face showed great astonishment at my change of attitude. He looked at me more closely. ‘Yes, Professor,’ I continued, ‘I have

been praying to my Heavenly Father all night long, asking Him to let you rot alive.' The impression of my quiet words on him was indescribable. His jaw dropped, and when he finally spoke he said: 'Is that really what you would like to happen to one of your fellow men?' 'Yes, Professor,' I said, 'I'd like to see you rot slowly, limb by limb.'

I was so amused by his reactions to what I said that I could hardly keep from laughing. He began to realise that I was making fun of him. He asked me whether I wanted to leave the padded cell. I said, no, I was quite satisfied to stay there as long as he wished. Then he left the cell without another word.

The next morning he came back, and repeated his question. I said that I refused to leave the cell. I had been brought there by force and I wished to leave the same way. When I made the same statement to him on the third day he ordered the warders to carry me back to my cell.

During the first few months of my imprisonment I considered Toebben a cold, heartless man. I had heard that he was very religious, and I thought him the type of man who did lip-service to religion, but who abused his fellow-men. I changed my opinion of him. I learned from my fellow prisoners that Toebben really tried to help the prisoners, especially those who were ill. He was not always successful because the prison governor opposed him. Sometimes Toebben tried for hours to dissuade the governor from inflicting severe punishments on prisoners who were ill.

After my attempt at suicide I was permitted to share a cell with two other prisoners. This was to prevent me from making any further attempts to take my life, and the comradeship was intended to give me a change. We were housed in two tiny connected cells. We were supposed to use one of them by day, and the other, in which there were two iron cots (one of us slept on the floor), by night. One of my companions was a sixty-three year old miner, who had been sentenced to one year's imprisonment because he had raped his twenty-year old daughter. The other, a man of about fifty-nine, originally a Dutchman, had also been sentenced to a year's imprisonment for incest.

The older man talked about women all day and all night long. He told us long stories about his rather unsavoury successes with women. His stories about how often he had beaten his wife during the forty years of his marriage were even more revolting. The younger of my fellow prisoners, too, talked about sex most of the time.

One of them made unnatural advances to me. At first, when he came over to my cot and whispered to me during the night, I thought I was having a horrible nightmare. I did not report him, however, as such things are severely punished in prison, and his term of imprisonment was almost ended. Both of my companions missed alcohol terribly. The *Kalfaktoren* had organised a thriving trade in the polishes and other liquids used in the carpentry department. A plug of chewing tobacco would be

exchanged for a small amount of liquid furniture polish. One of my companions was very sick after imbibing this liquid, but he did not care as long as he had been able to get some alcohol into his system. My other companion distilled this polish with the help of a few pieces of coal and bread until he had crude alcohol, which he greatly enjoyed.

In the long run it became intolerable to be locked up in such a small space with these two men. The air was incredibly foul. I wanted to ask the governor to move me back into a cell of my own, but I did not do so, for I did not want my fellow prisoners to think that, because I was a political prisoner, I thought myself better than they were, apart from which I learned a great deal from my association with these two men. They told me that their fathers, too, had been drunkards, and probably their drunkenness, as well as their over-emphasis of sex, was due to influences in childhood.

They both welcomed it when I talked to them about the organisation of labour, but I felt that as soon as they left the prison they would resume their former mode of life. They were too old to change, and all they wanted was to enjoy themselves as well as they could during the rest of their life.

We were given the job of turning old envelopes inside out for further use. For this work we received about twenty to thirty pfennige a month, which was not even enough to pay for the stamps we needed. I therefore refused to work, and spent my time studying the history of Socialism. After waiting

for a long time, Max Beer's book on the subject was finally given to me.

Often, when I was reading, I would be startled by the sound of screaming, which made me think that someone was being beaten. The governor had told me again and again that the warders were not permitted to strike the prisoners. He told me that prisoners were never beaten now. I asked the *Kalfaktor* where the screams came from, and whether he had ever seen prisoners being beaten. He said that prisoners were often beaten by the warders or by the other prisoners, but that I was never to say he had told me this, or he might be returned to solitary confinement. He said that I might have a chance myself to see that what he said was true. This usually happened, so he said, when prisoners were conducted to their cells by warders.

The *Kalfaktor* told me that he would let me know the next time it happened. I was to ask for some water to drink, and then, when my cell was opened, I could see what was going on outside. I did as he told me, and saw the warders striking prisoners, whom they were conducting to their cells, with bunches of keys and other hard objects. Careful warders did not risk beating the prisoners themselves; instead they bribed the *Kalfaktoren* who were, after all, fellow prisoners, to do this for them. In return they gave the *Kalfaktoren* a piece of chewing tobacco.

According to the prison rules, the prisoners were to have a bath every two weeks, but in practice they

had a bath only once a month. There were no more than five shower baths for the use of 800 prisoners. They had only a few seconds in which to bathe. There was neither enough time or enough water to wash properly.

Smoking was strictly forbidden in prison. There was no opportunity to buy tobacco or to have any sent from outside. Despite this fact there was smoking in almost all the cells. The *Kalfaktoren* maintained a thriving trade in the remains of chewed tobacco plugs. These remains were dried and cut up into small pieces. They were rolled up in bits of newspaper, which was supplied to every cell as lavatory paper. The prisoners made lighters out of a bit of string, a piece of flint, which they picked up in the courtyard, and a metal trouser button. The tinder was made of a bit of rag cut out of a shirt or a towel.

The smoking of old chewing tobacco was very unhealthy, especially for the consumptive prisoners. If prisoners were discovered smoking they were taken off to a special confinement cell. The punishment for cutting up towels or shirts to make tinder was particularly severe.

I often longed for a smoke myself, but I could not bring myself to use this dirty old tobacco. I tried it once but it made me sick for days. An official from the Prussian Ministry of Justice, who came to see me during the first few months of my imprisonment, said that he would see that I was allowed to smoke. I asked him whether he would do the same

for other prisoners. He said that he could not do this, as it would interfere with the prison discipline. I therefore refused his offer.

In the meantime I had heard that, apart from myself, there were one or two hundred other political prisoners in Münster. It was, however, made quite impossible for me to get into touch with my comrades. When I asked to be put in a cell with some of them, this was flatly refused. It took me months to arrange a meeting with them.

After Christmas in 1922 there was a great scandal in the prison. It was discovered that flour and beans had been sold from the prison kitchen. A number of warders had taken part in this theft. All the prisoners employed in the kitchens and bakeries were sent back to their cells and replaced by others. One of them even had a savings account book in his possession. It appeared that a warder had for years been smuggling food out of the prison, some of which he sold. As a reward he had opened a savings account for the prisoner who had helped him. The prisoners got less to eat in consequence. There was often trouble among the prisoners at Münster because the food was so bad. Once an open revolt almost broke out.

A fellow member of the Communist Party, a member of the Prussian Diet, named Menzel, came to visit the prison. I told him how very bad and indigestible the food was. The governor of the prison, who was present at this interview, jumped up and offered Menzel a sample of the bread.

Menzel tasted it, and said that it was good. I was very much surprised by his remark, for a number of prisoners were quite ill after having eaten the bread. The governor was, of course, very pleased at Menzel's approval of the bread.

When Comrade Stoecker came to Münster a few weeks later, and was offered a sample by the governor, he did not take it, saying that he knew, from his life in the army, what these 'samples' meant.

As my relations with the prison authorities were growing more and more strained, I asked to be moved to another prison. Through my lawyers I pointed out to the Prussian Ministry of Justice that were I to remain in Münster there might be serious trouble. My request was refused, however, because, so the Ministry thought, I could not be watched over so carefully in another prison.

My hunger-strike in the Czechoslovakian prison after the *Kapp-Putsch* had been successful, so I tried to force my removal to another prison by going on hunger-strike. Some of my fellow prisoners, who knew of my intention, urged me to hide a little chocolate in my cell before I began. I did so, but it made matters worse, for the small amount of chocolate I ate every day was very bad for my digestion, especially as I was refusing drink as well. My hunger-strike was not successful, for I was not moved to another prison. My parents wanted to give me a treat for Christmas. They sent me a package of sausages, fruit, and cake, because they had heard that every prisoner may receive one parcel

at Christmas time. At first the governor refused to let me have my parcel, and when at last he did send it to me the food was almost entirely spoiled, as he had kept it a long time in an overheated room.

While I was on hunger-strike the governor told me that he did not care, as he himself had enough to eat. I was so enraged by this remark that I spat at him, and was again sent to the padded cell.

Though the governor was always most unpleasant towards me, and though I hated him more than I had ever hated any other man, I began to realise that his job was really most antipathetic to him. He had no knowledge at all of human psychology, and did not understand that each prisoner must be treated as an individual. He was hoping to improve and educate the prisoners through his severity. The prisoners hated him. My own hatred for the man ended by changing into pity.

One day another prisoner was brought to the cell. The *Kalfaktoren* warned me that he was a very tricky fellow, and that he had only been sent to my cell because the governor hoped he would spy on me. He talked about his robberies and his other exploits. He told the police about the woman to whom he had been engaged, and who, so he told the police, had helped him with his last robbery. She had gone to prison for six months, he for a few years. She committed suicide while she was in prison. To me the man admitted that he had lied about her to the police. I decided to see that this fellow was removed from my cell.

He was hated by all the warders, as he had let down one of them, who had taken his (the prisoner's) letters to a young woman who lived near the prison. When the young woman's landlady had reported these secret letters to the governor, the warder had been blamed and punished for writing them, and the prisoner had not protested.

CHAPTER X

HUNGER - STRIKE

I ASKED the prison administration to have this fellow removed from my cell, as his stories were repulsive to me. He was not taken away, however, and I was obliged to take drastic measures to have him removed. Every time my cell door was opened, so that food and water could be brought to me, I ran out into the stone passage and refused to return unless this fellow were removed. The warders were thereupon forced to carry me back into the cell six times a day, and every time they did so, I began to sing revolutionary songs in a loud voice. I continued this procedure for almost two weeks, until the warders finally told the governor that they could not go on with it. Thereupon the man was moved to another cell.

The administration of a prison cannot proceed smoothly if there is the slightest hitch in the daily routine. Any well organised and well timed disturbance is as effective as sand poured into a Diesel engine. A considerable disturbance is created if one shouts out words of bitterness and revolt every time the doors are opened. I realised that I must try to hamper the smooth administration of the prison if I really wanted to be moved to another.

In the middle of the night I would shout revolutionary songs and verses out of my window. Some of the prisoners joined me, others complained that their sleep was being disturbed. They drummed against the cell doors with their wooden stools. The few night watchmen who were on duty were greatly excited, and ran from cell to cell telling us to be quiet. No one, least of all myself, paid any attention to them. I resolved to continue this fight until I had been moved to another prison. I decided also not to be intimidated by any punishments which might be inflicted on me in the meantime.

I was so weakened by the hunger-strike and the state of my nerves generally that the prison doctor sent me to the hospital. I could hardly walk across my cell without collapsing. Despite my condition, I continued my expressions of revolt in the prison hospital.

Three times the governor had failed to curb me by putting me in the padded cell, so he tried other means. There were four windows in the hospital cell, in which I was housed with two other prisoners. The governor had three of them – on the sunny side of the cell – walled up. Soon the cell was very cold and dark.

The two padded ‘torture’ cells were directly under our cell. The padded cells were constantly occupied. We were separated from the prisoners, who were being maltreated in them, just as I myself had been maltreated, only by the floor of our cell. At night, as well as during the day, we heard the

prisoners screaming and groaning beneath. Officially only prisoners who had gone mad were sent to these cells, but the governor of the prison sometimes kept sane men in them for days at a time.

Sanitary conditions in the prison were very bad indeed. A syphilitic prisoner, for instance, was employed to distribute the food. Not until many of the prisoners refused to eat at all as long as he brought them their food was he taken off this job.

Dozens of the prisoners were suffering from venereal disease. They were examined by the prison doctor from time to time, and given medicines and new bandages. The used bandages were often washed in the most casual manner in cold water, and then hung up in the hospital bathroom to dry, where they dripped into the bath.

I continued my campaign of revolt for over six months. The governor finally had a heavy woollen curtain fastened to the one window in my hospital cell, and whenever I began to shout this curtain was let down. As a result the cell was completely dark. However, I soon found a way to overcome this difficulty. I would push the broom between the window and the curtain so that my shouts could still be heard throughout the prison, as well as in the Münster streets. Large crowds of people congregated near the prison as a result. Part of the crowd swore and said I ought to be hanged, while others sympathised with me.

At night a number of policemen patrolled the prison underneath my window. Twenty-five *Sipo*

had been ordered to Münster shortly after my arrival. Their job – as the governor told me – was to prevent my escape. To annoy me these *Sipo* men sang patriotic songs outside my window at night or early in the morning. As a reprisal my two fellow prisoners and I organised a speaking chorus, in which hundreds of prisoners in other cells soon participated. Every time the *Sipo* men sang their Nationalist songs we declaimed in unison: ‘The day of freedom and revenge will come. Then we shall be your judges.’

One day some scaffolding was erected outside our window. It looked as though our last window was to be closed. This did not happen, but the governor had thought of something else. Automatic shutters, which could be closed by the turn of a hand, were attached to the window, so that a warder could close the cell hermetically any time we began shouting. The governor was convinced that this time he had beaten me. He sometimes kept me and my companions in this stuffy airtight cell for days at a time. I was afraid that this time the governor would indeed be victorious, for I could think of no way out. But in the end I had an idea. Once, after the cell had been closed for days, the doctor ordered that the shutters were to be opened for a little while, as we so badly needed fresh air. When the warder was not looking I put my slipper between the shutter and the window. When he tried to close the shutters as usual, he could not understand why the apparatus did not function properly. He got a

ladder and climbed up to see what was wrong. I quickly pulled my slipper away. The warder climbed down again and tried to close the shutters, but in the meantime I had put my slipper back.

The Prussian Ministry of Justice sent an assistant-governor, Dr. Hauptvogel, to Münster, who was much more humane than the governor, Dr. Scheidges. The latter was still in charge, but my case was now handled by Dr. Hauptvogel. Despite the fact that he was a prosecuting attorney he was soon greatly respected by all the prisoners. I found it difficult to continue my plan of revolt, as he was so decent, but I had resolved to be moved from Münster to another prison, which would be nearer Berlin and my lawyers.

The administration finally realised that it was high time to move me. My campaign had stimulated hundreds of other prisoners to revolt, and some of them shouted: 'We are hungry!' all night long.

Suddenly, one night, several motor cars drove into the prison courtyard. My lawyer Hegewisch, a physician, a major of the Berlin police, and a number of policemen, some in uniform and others in plain clothes, descended.

I was told that I was to be moved to another convict prison. I had been on hunger-strike for five days, and I was very weak. That is why a physician had been sent with the other men. When I was ready to leave, the police major and another officer stepped up to me and said that they had orders to put me in chains. The drive to the other prison was

to take two days, and I was to be in chains all this time. The chains were several yards long, with heavy bolts of iron, which were to be locked between my hands and feet.

I told the major that I would not consent to be put into chains in any circumstances, and that if he tried to do so, I would not leave the prison alive. I was not put in chains. Between two and three o'clock in the morning we drove away from the prison where, for fourteen months, I had fought such a hard, bitter fight against a cruel administration. I breathed more freely; I could not be worse off in any prison than I had been at Münster.

I was overcome by the beauty of the autumn landscape. I had not seen anything like it for fourteen months. I felt as though I had been cut off from the world for a much longer time. We arrived in Magdeburg that evening. Here I was locked into a cell at police headquarters for the night. The next day the drive continued. I thought I was being taken to the Saxony prison of Waldheim, but when we crossed the river Elbe and continued to drive towards the east, I realised that I was being taken somewhere else. I asked the police major whether, by any chance, he had orders to deport me to Moscow. When we were leaving the town of Kottbus, the motor cars suddenly stopped. A crowd had collected, and the policemen got out to see what was happening. My lawyer and I remained in the motor car, but when we grew tired of waiting we got out too.

An old woman, who had been run over by a private motor car, was lying in the middle of the road. She had been gathering wood in the forest. A perambulator, in which she had been pushing along her wood, had been demolished. No one in the crowd, not even the man whose car had run over her, thought of transporting her to a hospital. A policeman and I finally carried her to the car which had run over her. He told the owner of the car to drive her to the hospital at once.

I walked back to the spot where we had picked up the woman, and noticed that I was completely cut off from my party. None of the police were in the crowd near me. I was wearing civilian clothes, and no one knew that I was a convict. If I had walked a few steps into the forest near the road I should have escaped. I did not try to escape, however, even though I could have been safe in a foreign country, because from there it would have been more difficult to have my case taken up by the courts again. My flight would also have given the impression that I cared more for my personal freedom than I did for the fight against the miscarriage of justice which had sent me to prison. It took a few minutes for me to find my party again. The major had thought I was with the *Sipo* men and they in turn thought I was with the major.

The major begged my lawyer not to report this incident to the Press; it might cost him his job if it became known. My lawyer, however, was clever enough to have a statement, saying that I could have

escaped had I wanted to do so, signed by some of the police.

We reached Breslau at five o'clock in the afternoon. I was told that I was to be put in the part of the prison reserved for lunatics. I refused to be put there. The prison officials, who wanted to avoid a scene in the presence of my lawyer, sent me to a cell in the prison hospital for the night. After my lawyer had left I lay down on the cot. One of the warders sat down close to me, and left the light burning. I complained, saying that I could not go to sleep with the light burning, and asked him to leave the cell. He declared that he had strict orders to stay in order to prevent me from making any possible attempt at flight or suicide.

At nine o'clock in the morning - I had not slept at all - the prison governor came to my cell and told me I was to be moved to the department where mental cases were housed, at once. I protested and asked him why I was to be sent there. The only reason I could see was that they wanted to drive me mad. The governor said that he did not know the reason for this decision, but that he had received orders from Münster to do so. Then the prison doctor came to my cell, and without examining me at all he ordered me to be taken to the lunatic department. When I protested he only smiled ironically. When he made a few sarcastic remarks as well, I spat at him. He motioned to six male nurses, who carried me brutally away to a padded cell, which had been prepared for me. This cell was not unlike

the ‘torture cell’ in the Münster prison. The window, made of heavy glass, would not open, and the door was so heavily padded that no sound could penetrate through it. There was no table, and no chair, in the cell. The only furniture it contained was an iron cot.

To protest against having been put into a padded cell, I went on hunger-strike at once, even though I had been hunger-striking for five days before I left Münster. I had found it impossible to read while on hunger-strike, because the letters danced before my eyes. Illustrated papers were my only diversion. When I asked the warder to bring me an illustrated paper or book, he brought me a book which contained no pictures at all. I asked him again, using the word ‘pictures,’ as I thought he might not know the word ‘illustration.’ Thereupon the warder reported to the doctor that I was asking for a children’s picture book, and this request was interpreted as a symptom of my insanity.

The next day a warder told me that the other prisoners were asking whether I was Max Hoelz. He told me that the authorities had forbidden him to say that I was. Instead he was to say that my madness consisted in my thinking that I was Hoelz.

To force me to stop my hunger-strike the prison authorities used the following trick: I received a telegram signed with my brother-in-law’s name (I learned later that he had not sent it), urging me to desist from my hunger-strike, because I was soon to be released. I did not, however, interrupt my

hunger-strike for five days, when my lawyers came to see me, and promised to see the Ministry of Justice about having me removed from the padded cell.

Before I left Münster I had been told that I was being sent to a very healthy district, where there would be plenty of fresh air. While we were driving the physician and the police major told me the same thing. Now I had been locked up in a cell which was even worse than the 'torture cell' at Münster. The prison governor in Breslau told my lawyers that the Ministry of Justice had ordered me to be housed in the mental department of the prison. Officials in the Ministry, however, declared that this was not true. They said that the prison governor had done so on his own initiative. Everyone tried to push the responsibility on to someone else.

All night long the gaslight burned brightly in my padded cell. It was impossible to sleep. The complete lack of fresh air – which affected me more than a lack of food – caused me to have a nervous breakdown. I begged the doctor daily for a little fresh air, and asked to have the light turned out at night. The doctor refused, saying that it would do me harm to have the window opened for several hours a day, and that he could not, therefore, allow it. He said that the light could not be put out, as the warders were to watch my every moment. I was forced to remain in the padded cell for two months, and I was surrounded by brutality which surpassed anything I had experienced or witnessed in Münster. I kept

myself sane by summoning all my energy, and taking every possible opportunity to divert my thoughts from my situation.

After my first nervous breakdown Professor Toebben had advised me to do Müller exercises. He bought the book of instructions for me. At first I found these exercises very difficult; I collapsed every time I bent down. At the beginning I could only do the exercises for three to five minutes. In nine months I was able to keep them up for two hours at a time. I had also – at Toebben's suggestion – begun to rub myself with cold water every day.

I continued my exercises and the rubbing in the cell at Breslau. The warders intimated that they considered these exercises part of my insanity. As it was impossible to do exercises all day long, I tried to get hold of some scientific books which would divert me. The governor said that I could have these books if the doctor did not object. He refused, however, as he said they would be bad for me. I fought for weeks, until I was finally given Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, Bebel's *My Life*, and some books dealing with trade union problems. It was the first time I had read *Das Kapital*. I found it very difficult reading, even though I had been introduced to Marxism by Rühle's course. The first time I read the book I did not grasp its meaning. Even when I read it the second time I did not appreciate the enormous importance of this man, who had changed Socialism from an emotional doctrine into a science.

I realised that reading alone was not enough, and I therefore began to study each section of *Das Kapital* carefully. I considered Marx's theories in the light of my own experiences, both before and after 1918. I often read until three o'clock in the morning. If I had not had these books the light at night would have driven me mad. I began to realise that the injustice I was suffering was not directed against me as a person, but against my entire class. My sufferings were only a very small part of the sufferings of the class to which I belonged.

Often, while I was studying, I was able to forget where I was. Time and space seemed to vanish, and I was recalled to reality only when I heard the warders opening the heavy door to my cell. I was also brought back to reality when my lukewarm soup was brought to me in the morning, in a dirty cardboard cup. The *Kalfaktor* who brought it had grown up in a reformatory, and he was now held in the mental department because they did not know how to deal with him in the main part of the prison.

In the lunatic department of the prison there were many ways of subduing the prisoners. If the padded cells did not work, the warders gave the *Kalfaktoren* a plug of chewing tobacco, and they beat the prisoners in return. The warders pretended that they had nothing to do with these abuses, and arranged for the *Kalfaktoren* to carry out their plan when no one was watching.

Apart from the padded cells arranged for solitary

confinement, there were several community cells in the mental department. Some of these cells were used as dormitories. Often, during the night, prisoners who had resisted the warders during the day were beaten by some of their fellow prisoners, at the request of the warders. A blanket was tied round the prisoner's head and he was then beaten cruelly. Another method of punishment was for four of the prisoners to stand one of their fellows on his head and to hold him in this position for a long time. When a man died from this abuse the doctor was told that he had committed suicide. If the prisoner recovered and complained he was never believed by the governor.

The prison authorities had found a very effective method of silencing a prisoner who complained too often about maltreatment, the poor food, or lack of sanitation: he was simply locked away in the lunatic department of the prison. After he had been put down in the record as being mad, his complaints were never believed. This method had been used in my case when I was in Münster. I found this out because the chief warder in the Münster prison hospital, a decent fellow, who unfortunately died later from cancer, showed me my records. I reported this fact to my lawyer Fraenkl, without telling him how I had heard about it. Fraenkl remonstrated for some time before he succeeded in having me examined and observed by a brain specialist who came to Münster from the University of Frankfort. When he had made a statement saying

that I was perfectly sane, the governor could not, of course, any longer claim that I was mad.

The physician in the men's prison at Breslau was extremely unpopular, but the doctor in the women's prison, who sometimes took his place in the men's prison, was so beloved by all the prisoners that if he crossed the courtyard while they were walking they all nodded to him. One felt that this man did everything he possibly could to make things easier. He was also popular among the prison warders and officials. I often talked with this doctor. He was a *bourgeois*, who had not the slightest interest in Communist or Socialist doctrines, but he had a strong sense of justice.

I read Korolenkos' *My Contemporaries*, with a magnificent introduction by Rosa Luxemburg, which she had written while she was imprisoned in Breslau. Her introduction made such an impression on me that I re-read it again and again.

One of the prisoners in the lunatic department was a man of about thirty, who was serving a life sentence – he had then been in prison for about ten years – because he had killed a man. He was always in solitary confinement. He was quiet, and never took part in any of the prisoners' quarrels. Once, when my relatives had come to see me, and had left me a cake of chocolate, I gave it to this man when I passed him on the staircase. He was so pleased that thereafter he beamed at me whenever we met.

One day, when I was walking in the courtyard,

I saw this man, who was usually so quiet, running through the corridors and smashing all the windows he passed with his fist. After he had demolished several windows – his hands were bleeding profusely – the warders caught him and took him to the padded cell. I learned later that he had broken the windows as a protest. He was afraid that if he were kept in the lunatic department, where he had already spent a year, any longer, he would go out of his mind. He wanted to be sent back to the regular prison, and he actually was sent back. It appeared that he had been kept in the lunatic department for so long because he was the only tailor in that department.

Some prisoners pretend to be mad, because they think life in a lunatic department is easier than in a prison. If they succeed in deceiving the doctors, and are actually sent to an asylum they realise that they were mistaken. I have known prisoners who pretended to be mad, and who, as a result, spent ten years in a lunatic asylum, whereas they had only been sentenced to three or five years imprisonment. The fate of prisoners who at first pretend to be mad and then really do lose their minds is terrible.

CHAPTER XI

SOLITUDE

SHORTLY before Christmas 1923 I was moved to the main part of the prison. I was given a cell with a stone floor, which was very bad for me, as I had contracted rheumatism in the 'torture cell' in Münster. It took me a year to have the stone floor covered with wood. In the meantime my rheumatism had grown so bad that I could not do my exercises for months. During the winter the cell was heated only from nine in the morning until one o'clock in the afternoon. My cell was still lighted, and I would sit wide awake in the cold almost all night long. There were some special shutters outside the small window, so that there was very little fresh air in the cell, and the sky was never visible. The window was so dirty that the light which did penetrate was grey and dull. The cell in Münster had seemed like a tomb, but this one in Breslau was even more like one. The whitewashed walls were completely bare, and the stone floor had been painted with black oil, which gave out a foul odour. Several years before some of the prisoners in these cells had been exhibitionists, and that was why the shutters had been put up. I sent several petitions to the authorities

asking to have these shutters removed. The chairman of the Prussian Department of Prisons, who was a humane man, realised that these shutters should be removed, but nothing was done about it. If these shutters are still in front of the windows of the Breslau prison, the public should agitate to have them finally removed.

Besides myself there were fifteen to twenty other political prisoners in the Breslau prison. In January 1924 we heard about Lenin's death. On the day of his funeral we Communists refused food, to show our united grief at his death. I had been so completely cut off from the outside world while I had been in the asylum, that I could not follow political or economic events. In the main part of the prison I learned that great changes were occurring throughout Germany. The inflation had impoverished many people, especially minor officials. Even the chief warders, who did not usually bother about politics, began to curse the Government. Formerly the warders had never dared to talk to me and they had never discussed politics with me. Now, however, they said quite frankly that they would welcome a revolution and that they would take part in one if they had the chance.

I gathered from the *bourgeois* papers – we were not allowed to read the Communist papers – that there was considerable unrest among the workers, that the *bourgeoisie* and the Government were expecting some active attacks from Nationalist and Communist organisations. My friends outside

sent me secret messages, saying that I must make every effort to escape, as I was needed. They also said that my presence would stimulate the revolutionary workers to renewed activity. In response to my friends' suggestion I worked out a careful plan of escape, and smuggled a detailed map of the prison buildings and grounds to them.

Everything seemed to be working out well. Six comrades from Berlin and the Vogtland came to Breslau and took a taxi-cab at the station. They drove to the prison, and two of them told the door porter that they were prison inspectors who had come with a transport of prisoners from Goerlitz.

The door porter asked them to come into his little room and to turn over their documents to him. Then the comrades snatched his keys from him and made him stand up against the wall. They said that they would shoot him if he made the slightest sound. He saw the pistols in their hands, so he believed what they said, and remained quiet. Two of them remained with him, while the others rushed into the prison buildings. I had arranged to be taking my exercise in the courtyard when they arrived. I heard them coming; now they were only four feet away from me; now only the door into the courtyard separated me from them. And they had the key. Suddenly, however, they turned and ran away from the prison, although no one had obstructed their path. This attempt to release me in broad daylight created quite a stir, although none of the comrades was ever arrested. I could not understand why they

had run away so suddenly. Later, when I was again at liberty, I learned that one of the comrades had given a wrong signal.

I was very much depressed by the failure of my plan, which had been such a safe one. Now I was guarded even more closely than before, so that I could hardly bear it. Day and night I was watched by special warders. A special lock was made for my cell. I was not allowed to spend any time with the other prisoners. I was forced to run round in a circle by myself in the courtyard.

Solitary confinement makes all men supersensitive I knew from my own experience, and from watching other prisoners, how disastrous are the effects of solitary confinement and the social abstinence it implies. A man in solitary confinement is entirely dependent on his own resources. According to modern prison regulations, the warders are instructed to speak to the prisoners and to divert their thoughts from themselves. In practice, however, this is quite impossible, for the warders are over-worked, and have little time to talk. I reckoned up that on some days a single warder at Breslau opens and closes a hundred and sixty cell doors altogether fourteen thousand times. Even if the warders had time to talk to the prisoners they do not often do so, as they are afraid that this might get them into trouble.

The warders in Breslau were forbidden to speak to me. Some of them did so, however, but they had to be careful, so that it would not be noticed by the other warders and prisoners.

One day when Governor Vaupel saw that two warders were speaking to me while I was waiting outside his office he was furious, and said that if this happened again he would have them removed. As a matter of fact I had only asked them how much longer I would have to wait to see the Governor.

Most of the older warders, who had been in the prison for years, were very silent, because they were accustomed to the old days when absolute silence was imposed in the prisons. Often they did not answer even when they were asked a purely routine question.

Solitary confinement makes a man very dependent on himself. He thinks only of his sufferings, his desires, and his hopes. Prison labour is so monotonous that it offers no diversion. The books contained in prison libraries are rarely interesting. During my fourteen months at Münster I was not given a single book which was really instructive. In Breslau the library consisted chiefly of second rate novels. During all the years of my imprisonment in Gross Strehlitz the library was only increased by twenty volumes, despite the fact that there were more than seven hundred prisoners there. A few of these new books were interesting, but they were not given to the prisoners for a long time, because the officials read them first.

Only about twenty or thirty prisoners received newspapers, which might not be handed on. As a rule only those prisoners who earn enough to pay

for them may subscribe to newspapers. As the prisoner's maximum share of his earnings was usually about a mark, most of them could not afford it, especially as they had to pay for their own stamps, toothpaste, and other articles with their earnings. The newspapers are heavily censored before they are given to the prisoners. It is forbidden to subscribe to Communist newspapers, but even the *bourgeois* papers are drastically censored. In Breslau and Münster whole columns are cut out of the papers by the prison administration. Even the parliamentary reports are often blacked out. A prisoners' newspaper called *Der Leuchtturm* (The Lighthouse) is circulated in a number of Prussian prisons. This little paper is filled with articles about the Creator and about 'just punishment.' Sometimes sentimental poems, in praise of the prison governors and chaplains, are published in this paper.

In their search for some occupation many of the prisoners think of the strangest diversions. In Gross Strehlitz some of the prisoners were allowed to own a musical instrument which they could play on Sundays.

The prisoners feel the terrible effects of their solitary confinement most poignantly when their relatives come to see them. Some of the prisoners whom I knew did not have any visitors for years, because their families had abandoned them or could not afford the journey to the prison. The prisoners who were visited every three months or every year by a member of their families were often as

much upset as they were cheered by this event.

People outside prison cannot possibly imagine what agony it is to see the members of one's family under supervision. In Breslau the prisoners were usually permitted to talk with their visitors for ten or twenty minutes. If, however, the warders were very busy and unable to supervise these visits they were often reduced to five minutes.

The outsider must try to imagine what it is to take a long journey, which costs about a hundred marks, only to see a man for ten minutes, when one has not seen him for months or years. And then one does not see him alone, and the warder who is supervising the visit listens to every word that is spoken.

Most prisoners are terribly excited before their relatives arrive. They think of a hundred things to ask them, and grow more and more excited as the time set for the visit draws nearer. When, however, the hour arrives, and the prisoner sits in the reception room, separated from his visitor by a wooden grating, he is often so agitated that he cannot speak. Before he knows what to say the time is up. In exceptional cases prisoners may see their relatives for half an hour, but even then a warder is always present, and it is impossible to discuss private worries or family matters. Prisoners consequently often grow away from their families or friends, who should be their last hold on life. All prison governors know quite well that this system of supervised visits causes these disastrous results.

Many prisoners whom I knew became so desperate shortly before they were expecting a visitor that they tried to commit suicide. Some of the warders, furthermore, used to repeat the family affairs they had heard discussed when the prisoners received visitors. When, in October 1923, my wife came to see me to discuss our divorce, this news, too, was broadcast by the warder supervising us. No improvements of modern prison systems can really prevent the physical and mental harm done to the prisoners by this confinement. All the systems must fail, furthermore, as long as the prisoners are not permitted to see their wives alone.

I suffered as much as any of the prisoners because of the enforced sexual abstinence. I often did my exercises for a long time during the night, or poured a jug of cold water over my entire body.

The prevalence of homo-sexuality in prisons is another problem. The solitary confinement and the association only with men cause many prisoners who have never been actively homo-sexual before to follow this line. Homo-sexuality is encouraged in most prisons by the fact that when they are over-crowded during the winter months three men often share a single cell. Some prisoners who become homo-sexual merely from curiosity become inured to it, and continue. Homo-sexual relationships among the prisoners often lead to tragedies. In Gross Strehlitz, for instance, I knew a prisoner who had formed such a relationship with a very young comrade. He tried for months to be moved

into the same cell as his friend, but when he finally succeeded the results were disastrous, for a third man had to be put into the cell as well. This man was also attracted by the young prisoner, and as a result the three were separated and put into separate cells. One day, when the man who had originally been attracted by the young prisoner passed his rival on the way to the courtyard, he struck him such a blow across the head that this man was ill for weeks. In the end the man who had inflicted this blow hanged himself in his cell, as he could not bear the separation from his young friend.

Many of the prisoners and warders feel contempt for their homo-sexual comrades. I tried to explain that homo-sexuality is a matter of temperament. I asked Erich Mühsam to send me Magnus Hirschfeld's books. Hirschfeld then sent me the two volumes of his *Sexology*, which were read with intense interest by the warders and the prisoners. In a few weeks these books resulted in more enlightenment than I could have achieved from talking to the men for months.

Only very few inspectors and warders in the prison had any understanding of the prisoners' psychology. The prison teacher in Breslau was a man named Winkler, who was a great exception. Though he was a staunch monarchist and very old fashioned, this man was very kind to all the prisoners, not excepting the Communists. He often arranged for the discharge of prisoners before their time was up. Often he was disappointed in these men, but he continued

nevertheless to do his best for all of us. The cashier in the Breslau prison was as unfair as Winkler was fair. He always favoured wealthy prisoners, and accepted money from their families. This man was eventually arrested for stealing money out of the box of one of the wealthy prisoners.

The prison governor in Breslau, Wilhelm Vaupel, was a Catholic priest, who was very religious and who talked a great deal about brotherly love. This did not prevent him, however, from being an outrageous liar. One day, for instance, I asked him whether the shutters in front of my window could be opened a little. As he happened to be in a good humour he granted my request, and at once asked the warder to carry out my wishes. The next day, when the governor was walking across the courtyard, and saw that the shutters in front of my window had been opened, he was furious, and denied having given this order.

All the prisoners suffered because of his changeability and forgetfulness. He often destroyed parts of our letters home without telling us he had done so, and when we complained he merely said that it was not his duty as governor of the prison to tell us what he had done. Whenever he could, Vaupel counteracted my efforts to have my case taken up again by the courts. Once he held back a letter from my lawyers for weeks. In this letter they had written to tell me the status of my case, so that Vaupel's action was more than inconvenient for me.

Once when he came to my cell, he asked me why

my appearance was so changed. He said that only half an hour ago I had looked quite different. When I told him that this was due to the excruciating pain of my rheumatism, which was caused by the stone floor, he merely said that prayer was a good cure for rheumatism.

In the spring I asked the prison administration whether I might be allowed to cultivate a bit of waste land which was situated in the centre of the courtyard. I was allowed to do so, and one of the older warders, who was always kind to the prisoners, brought me a dozen lettuce plants from his home. I planted them, and they grew nicely. The prison officials and the governor himself watched my salad grow, and there was great excitement in the prison when the day came for me to cut it. The governor wanted to punish the warder who had brought me the plants. As the man was married and had four children he was very anxious about his job. There was tremendous excitement about these little heads of lettuce. When I heard that the governor wanted to sack the warder I threatened to write to the Prussian Minister of Justice, to tell him that many of the higher prison officials had given some of the prisoners cigars and tomatoes. My threat was successful, and the warder was not dismissed.

I was so depressed by the failure of my attempt to escape, as well as by my divorce, and I was so miserable in my cold cell with its stone floor that I suffered a worse nervous breakdown than the one I had experienced in Münster. I was also very

depressed by the fact that there were differences within the Communist Party that caused the re-viewing of my case to be postponed. I was determined to get away from Breslau. It was a prison and not a detention centre, and people thought therefore that my life sentence had been reduced to a number of years of imprisonment. For this reason it was difficult for me to have my case reconsidered by the courts. Really of course, I was treated just as I had been before, and that was as a convict sentenced for life.

I fainted again and again in my cell, and in the courtyard. Once or twice I fell down the stone stairs and hurt myself badly. Once in my cell I fell down on a broken plate. The wound in my head was bleeding so badly that I tried again and again in vain to call the warder. When I finally succeeded it took half an hour to summon a doctor, as there was no physician in the prison. I was so weak that I could hardly move. Some friends of mine, members of the Communist Party, who came to see me at this time, urged me to write to Löbe, the President of the Reichstag, asking him whether he could not arrange to have me moved to a hospital. They also suggested that I ask to be sent to a fortress, as they said that fortress imprisonment was less arduous than my present situation. I wrote to Löbe, but none of my requests was granted.

Some friends from Saxony came to see me, but they found me in a hopeless state. As soon as they mentioned the treatment I had received in the

mental department, I could not say a word, and began to sob. Books were my only comfort. My friends in the Vogtland had endeavoured to help me to collect a small library in my cell. All my books were political, including works by Müller-Lyer, Professor Vorländer, and Max Stirner. Armin T. Wegner's *Anklage* made a great impression upon me, and I read it again and again.

CHAPTER XII

RESISTANCE

WHEN my divorce from my wife Klara had been made absolute, I looked feverishly for a woman comrade who would be willing to enter into a *mariage de convenience* with me. I wrote to a number of comrades to ask whether they knew of any woman who would be willing to do this, and who, as my wife, would be allowed to come and see me regularly, thus becoming my link with the outside world. At Christmas, in 1924, I talked with Comrade Arthur Dombrowski, the editor of the Breslau Communist paper, who was then in prison for a short time. He promised me that when he was released in a fortnight he would find some woman comrade for me, and he kept his word.

He first suggested two German-Russian comrades, Lena and Katya, one of whom had fought in the Russian Red army. Both of them came to see me as often as they could, and agitated everywhere to bring about a review of my case in the courts. Dombrowski then found a German comrade, a woman named Traute, who enthusiastically entered into a *mariage de convenience* with me. Comrade

Traute, who was now legally my wife, was indefatigable in her activities on my behalf. As the wife of 'Comrade Hoelz' she spoke at hundreds of meetings all over Germany. It was she who finally brought about a re-hearing of my case. She also worked for the Red Help, an organisation which was working for the release of all political revolutionary prisoners.

When the governor realised that public opinion was again becoming interested in my case, and that people were beginning to know how badly he was treating me, he changed his attitude. Therefore I was permitted to spend two hours in the courtyard with two other prisoners. I was also allowed to smoke. My fellow prisoners, who were doing time, and not life sentences, were permitted to smoke in any case. There was therefore no reason why I should not do so. I was also allowed to use the twenty marks which the Red Help sent me monthly, to buy fruit and newspapers. The governor, furthermore, permitted me to receive visitors more often.

I knew that many of my fellow sufferers who were actually imprisoned in penal settlements were not given so much freedom, and I therefore asked to be sent to penal servitude. My request was refused, however, on the grounds that I could not be as carefully watched in any other prison in this part of Germany. I therefore announced that I would try to force my removal, as I had done in Münster. My lawyers and my friends in the party were horrified when they heard that I wanted to be moved

back to a penal centre. They said that I was mad to want to leave Breslau, where I had been given so many privileges. They did not realise that I could not bear the thought of being better treated than my fellow sufferers.

I prepared my campaign of resistance secretly. I smuggled letters out of the prison to my friends, telling them how they could assist me from outside. I also wrote articles showing up the governor and the cashier of the prison. These articles were published in the Communist papers.

The governor began a system of reprisals. I was no longer permitted to receive visitors, and one day my wife Traute, and comrades Lena and Katja were arrested. All three of them spent weeks in the women's prison. In the meantime their rooms were searched for letters and documents. My plans of resistance were thereby discovered by the prison administration. This forced me to take action sooner than I had originally intended.

One day – I had no idea that my wife and the other two women comrades had been arrested – when I was walking in the courtyard I noticed that some strange civilians were watching me from the cashier's window. Then I saw four men, who were quite obviously plain-clothes men, running in the direction of my cell. I realised at once that my cell was to be searched. I knew that they would find nothing, but I was equally sure that in the end they would search my person. I was carrying a packet of letters and an article about the governor, which

I was going to smuggle out of the prison the next day. I knew that if the plain clothes men found this article on me it would mean a triumph for the governor. I did not know what to do with the documents in my pocket, as the warder, as well as the men at the window, were watching me closely. I was called in a few minutes, and was taken to the examination room, which was merely an empty double cell, in which there was no furniture except a table and four chairs. I was alone in this room, but several warders were guarding the door. I realised that the plain clothes men might enter at any moment, and the documents in my pocket were as good as lost. I did not know what to do. Then it occurred to me suddenly that I might hide the letters under a cushion lying on one of the chairs. This was a daring thing to do, because a slight movement of the chair would have brought my packet to light. I had only just hidden the documents when the governor and six plain clothes men entered the room. It happened to be the governor who sat down on the chair on which I had hidden my documents. I was carefully searched, but when nothing was found on my person I was taken back to my cell. I was sure that the documents had been lost as far as I was concerned.

When I heard the *Kalfaktor* walking by my cell I knocked at my door, and whispered to him, asking him to go and see whether my letters were still on the chair. He did so, and the next morning I found the letters unopened in my empty bucket.

Shortly after this incident – it was the end of June – I began my campaign of resistance, hoping to force the authorities to move me to a penal prison.

As soon as my cell was opened in the morning I dashed out of it, and began to recite passages from Mühsam, Wegner, and Karl Liebknecht in a loud voice. I did this morning, noon and night, whenever the cell was opened, and the warders were obliged to use force to get me back into my cell. As a result the governor had me locked up in a padded cell for twelve days. This cell was as filthy as the one in Münster had been. As I had nothing to read, and the light was kept burning all night long, these days were terrible. I complained about the conditions of the cell, and I was told that they would not be changed.

To keep myself sane I forced myself to continue my gymnastic exercises, but when, after twelve days, I was finally taken out of the padded cell, I was quite as ill as I had been in Münster. As a further punishment my books and writing materials had been taken out of my cell. I was not allowed to receive my newspapers, and no visitors were permitted. My daily walk in the courtyard was shortened by half an hour. Actually, because of my rheumatism, the prison regulations did not permit this harsh treatment, but the prison doctor, who was a very brutal man, had certified that I was not as ill as I claimed to be. I was forced to spend two weeks in a specially locked up cell, but as soon as

I was returned to my own cell I began again to resist the prison rules. I realised that unless I was sent to a penal prison my friends outside would undoubtedly think that my life sentence had been reduced to a fixed term of imprisonment, and they would therefore lose interest in my case.

I was again locked up in the padded cell for four days, but as soon as I returned to my own cell I began again to carry out my campaign of resistance. I was taken to the padded cell for the third time, but after I had been there for two days a motor car appeared in the middle of the night. Though it was pouring with rain I was transported to the convict prison at Gross Strehlitz just as I was, in a thin duck suit, without a hat, and wearing slippers, in an open car.

My two years in Gross Strehlitz were worse than anything I had experienced before. As luck would have it, the governor in Gross Strehlitz, like the one in Breslau, had only held this post for a short time. He, too, had been a prison chaplain before he became a governor. Much as I hate public prosecutors, I must confess that I prefer them to chaplains as prison governors. Before I had become interested in politics I had liked and respected a number of ministers of the gospel, and I was not prejudiced against them. The prison governors in Breslau and Gross Strehlitz taught me that I had been mistaken in my judgment of them.

In Gross Strehlitz I was completely isolated. I was separated from all the other prisoners, and the

way I was treated reminded me of the Inquisition. The other prisoners, sentenced for life – there were about forty or fifty, and some of them had committed two or three murders – were treated more humanely than I was. Even the murderers were not forced to walk in the courtyard alone, and even though they were forbidden to talk, the other prisoners were occasionally able to whisper a few words to each other.

Two or three warders always took me down to the courtyard for my walk. Before I stepped out of my cell all the other prisoners were ordered to leave the passages. If we did happen to meet another prisoner he was stood with his face to the wall, so that he could not see me. This ridiculous procedure made all the prisoners curious to see me, and many of them tried to watch me in the courtyard from their cell windows. When the warders noticed a face at a window they made a note of the cell, and reported any prisoner who tried to get a glimpse of me. Some of them tried to shout down a word of greeting into the courtyard, and as a result they were severely punished by the chief inspector.

No *Sipo* men had been stationed in the town before I arrived in Gross Strehlitz. Two days after my arrival a patrol of *Sipo* were quartered in the prison. Thereafter when I walked round in a circle in the courtyard for half an hour my warders were joined by *Sipo* men, whose job it was to see that I did not try to escape. The warder was usually joined by three or four other *Sipo* men, who ob-

viously enjoyed forcing me to pass them as I walked round. They laughed at me, and made sarcastic remarks, and blew their cigarette smoke into my face. I complained about this to the inspector in charge, and to the governor. My complaints were unsuccessful, and the *Sipo* men continued to watch me as though I were an animal in the Zoo. One day I told them that they ought to be ashamed of themselves, and that it would be better for them to do some work. They complained because I had called them 'frogs'* and idlers, and as a result the governor informed me that I was to be locked up in a special cell for a period. I therefore refused to take my walk in the courtyard, because I thought that this would force the governor to keep the *Sipo* men away. In a few days I realised that my resistance had done no good. I lost my patience, picked up some of the stones lying about in the courtyard, and threw them at the *Sipo*. I hoped that they would be so angry that they would shoot at me. They did not do so, however, but they did stop coming to the courtyard when I was taking my walk. Instead they often sneaked up to my cell, looked through the spy hole, and jeered at me. Whenever I noticed that I was being spied on in this way I took my stool and drummed against the door until they went away. The governor used to invite his friends in the town to come and watch me taking my walk in the courtyard. He would then join them at his window, and watch them making fun of me.

* The *Sipo* men wore green uniforms.

According to the prison regulations prisoners who had spent three years in solitary confinement were permitted to share a cell with another man. They were also allowed to take their walk in the courtyard in company with some of the other prisoners. I asked to take my walk with the other three political prisoners who were then in the prison. The governor promised to let me do so, but that night the other three prisoners were removed to another prison.

For six months I was not given a single book. After that I was given one at a time from the prison library, but I was not allowed to have any books of my own, nor was I permitted to see any newspapers.

All the other cells were fitted with one lock only. Two safety locks were fixed to the door of my cell. When I was being shaved or having my hair cut by the prison barber, who was himself a prisoner, two warders stood at my side to see that I did not exchange a single word with him. This complete isolation was very depressing. The governor expected me to work at finishing off stockings all day long, labour which is usually performed by little girls, but which can drive a man insane. I tried to do it, as the governor said that if I did he would improve my situation. When I realised that he had not meant what he said, I refused to work.

One day the monotony of my cell was interrupted by a strange noise. I could not imagine what the hollow sounds could be. I thought someone must be calling my name. There was a little ventilating shaft in the wall in one corner of the cell. I called

into this shaft, and I heard someone saying, as though from a great distance: 'I am the prisoner who looks after the central heating. I am sitting in the loft under the roof. I must be careful not to let anyone know that I am talking to you, as it is strictly forbidden. Perhaps you remember seeing me - I am the man with the big beard. I know that you are having a bad time, so I will tie some old newspapers and some bacon and bread to a string, and put it down the shaft.'

The next day I talked with this prisoner again, and he told me that the prisoners were often beaten. He also said that there were frequent suicides. My mysterious friend offered to smuggle letters out of the prison for me, and said that he would bring me writing materials.

I wrote to Erich Mühsam, describing my situation to him. I attached this letter to a string, and my unknown friend pulled it up the shaft and arranged to have it posted. This letter reached a friend of mine, who was a member of the Communist Party in Breslau, and who arranged to have it published.

The prison authorities were alarmed when they found that I had been able to communicate with the outside world, despite all their precautions. The offices of the Breslau Communist Party were searched, and my secret letter was found. The governor came to my cell and asked me whether I had actually smuggled the letter out of the prison. I said: 'Of course I have not. How could I, when I am so carefully watched?' The governor beamed, and said

that he had told the authorities that I could not possibly have done so. While the governor was speaking I heard my friend above pushing a parcel down the shaft. Luckily the governor did not notice it. I therefore decided to send another letter out of the prison in the same way.

This time I was not so fortunate. My friend with the beard did not have an opportunity of sending the letter out at once, and it was found in his cell. He was severely punished. I was given four weeks confinement in the special cell. My diet consisted of only bread and water. This special cell was in a filthy condition, and at night rats and mice ran around and ate the bread I had kept. The walls were covered with criticisms of the governor. The cot on which I slept for four weeks was a heavy oak plank, which was fastened to a stone base with big iron screws. These screws, which stuck out of the wood, made it quite impossible for me to sleep. Not until I had protested again and again did the governor have them filed down.

The physical and psychological effects of a lengthy confinement in this kind of cell are as devastating as the effects of a padded cell. When prisoners leave this cell after a number of weeks or months they are often mentally deranged. I tried to keep my sanity by reciting poetry and doing my gymnastic exercises.

CHAPTER XIV

WARDERS

IN a month's time I was taken back to my regular cell. The shaft had been walled up, and the governor had given instructions for special iron shutters to be put up over my window. The cell was so stuffy that I could hardly breathe, but when I complained to the governor he said that it was all my own fault. He said that he would make it quite impossible for me to smuggle letters out of the prison. I was lying on my bed, because my rheumatism was so bad, and when the governor spoke to me in this way I was so angry that I spat at him. Thereupon I was sentenced to four more weeks special confinement. I spent from the 25th of November until the 24th of December 1925 in a special cell. One of the head warders, a man named Czursiedel, who was known for his cruelty, made me so angry that I refused to put my bucket and water jug outside the cell. I hoped that the *Kalfaktor*, who was a friend of mine, would be told to fetch these things, because I wanted to give him a letter to my friends. The head warder, however, did not do so, and my bucket was not emptied for weeks. Consequently the floor of the cell was covered with filthy water. In the end bricks and

boards were brought into the cell so that the warder could walk across to the window, which he came to open for a moment once a day. The prison doctor did nothing to improve my insanitary condition. I tried to do my gymnastic exercises standing on my iron bed, but I was always in danger of falling into the filthy water on the floor below. The bucket was not emptied nor the cell cleaned until shortly before I left it.

On Christmas Eve, when I was taken back to my regular cell, the other prisoners were receiving Christmas parcels from their families. I was informed by the governor that any parcels which came for me from my family or from the Red Help were to be sent back, and that I was to be punished, furthermore, by not being given writing materials or a newspaper for two weeks. He continued by saying that to show me how kind he really was he had taken things from the other prisoners' parcels for me. He pointed to a box standing on my table, in which there were a few apples, nuts and cakes. He apparently expected me to be delighted by this gift, but I refused it, to his great surprise. I tried to explain to him that by returning my parcels he was hurting my parents and my friends much more than he was hurting me. I asked him to write to my family telling them that they might send the parcels again. I told him that I would be glad to give the contents to the men who were in the prison hospital. If he had done this my family and a number of the prisoners would have been given a pleasure. When he refused I was so

angry that I spat at him again. This time he did not punish me with special confinement. It seemed to dawn on him gradually that this punishment had no effect on me. He said that I could spit at him occasionally if it did me any good, but that he did not want the other prisoners and the warders to see me do it, as it would weaken his position.

For months the governor forced me to write the letters to my lawyer in his office, under the supervision of four prison clerks. The other prisoners were allowed to write their letters in their cells, but I was not permitted to have any writing materials. The governor knew that a man who is in solitary confinement most of the time could not possibly concentrate in a crowded room. He held back all my letters to my lawyers for weeks. I was not allowed to write to my family at all.

When my lawyer Laskowski, who, like the governor, was a member of the Centre Party and who was an old schoolfellow of the governor's, came to see me I was not allowed to shake hands with him. A large table separated me from him, and as soon as I tried to tell him how badly I was being treated the governor had me taken back to my cell.

The governor refused to let me buy toothpaste and soap, as well as fruit and other foodstuffs. As a result – the prison food was often miserable – I was frequently very hungry. The governor, Adamietz, often told strangers what he had read in the prisoners' letters to or from their families. I often had the impression that his great cruelty was due to a desire

to hide his inefficiency. He was completely under the thumb of the chief inspector, who kept careful note of all the governor's mistakes. The chief inspector made fun of the governor whenever he had the chance.

The prison in Gross Strehlitz was more crowded than any of the others I had known. Large numbers of cells were used for special confinement, which shows how severely the prisoners were treated. In the night we often heard cries for help. During the night from the 27th to the 28th of April, 1926, a prisoner named Wolf began to scream desperately because he was being beaten by two of the warders. Another prisoner was so savagely beaten by Czursiedel one night that he bit his tormentor's arm. He was severely punished for having done this, and Czursiedel carried his arm in a sling for weeks.

According to a regulation of 1918, the confinement of prisoners in darkened cells had become illegal. This system of punishment was, however, not obsolete in Gross Strehlitz. I frequently saw prisoners being locked up in darkened cells. When I threatened the authorities that I would make this practice known the iron shutters were removed from a number of darkened cells.

The Chief Administrator of all the prisons in Silesia and Upper Silesia, Dr. Egon Humann, was very decent. He tried in vain to improve the condition of the prison. He had been an English prisoner of war, and had learned what it is to be a prisoner. Because of his attempts to improve

conditions he was bitterly criticised by the prison governors and inspectors. The Governor of the Gross Strehlitz prison always spoke most disparagingly of Humann, and said that after all he was the governor of the prison, and his word was law. Once I discussed the abolition of capital punishment with Adamietz. Though he had been a Catholic priest and talked a great deal about his love of humanity, he favoured capital punishment very strongly.

Formerly the prisoners in Prussian prisons were occupied with weaving. Even during my time there were a number of looms in the cells at Gross Strehlitz. The prisoners hated these looms, because a high percentage of the men who were forced to work at them contracted tuberculosis. Adamietz had a number of the old looms brought to Gross Strehlitz, and when the prisoners had made a great effort to produce a large quantity of cloth they were usually rewarded with a signed photograph of the governor, which they were allowed to hang in their cells. Because the prisoners hurried so with their weaving the quality of the cloth was poor. When the Control Commissioner visited the prison the governor would only show him samples of perfect cloth, for he liked to boast that Gross Strehlitz was the most efficient and productive prison in Prussia.

The iron discipline and the constant supervision of prison life rob the prisoner of every vestige of self-confidence. He becomes imbued with a sense of inferiority which it is very difficult for him

to throw off after he has left the prison. It should also be remembered that when prisoners are finally released they want to make up for all the pleasures they have missed during the years of their imprisonment. These pleasures cost a good deal of money, which they think they can procure most quickly by some new theft.

In the prisons of Gross Strehlitz and Sonnenburg, as well as in other prisons, the warders can be divided into three groups, two of which are constantly at war with one another. The first group includes warders who consider it a social error that prisoners should be treated humanely. The second group includes warders who are completely indifferent. They perform their tasks mechanically, and never speak to the prisoners. Then there is a third group of warders, who do everything in their power within the regulations to help the prisoners. These warders have learned that prisoners react favourably to kind treatment. In Sonnenburg there were eight or ten warders who belonged to this category. The chief inspector, named Schneidau, belonged to the third group. He was able to deal with the most difficult prisoners, when the other warders, because of their abrupt manner, failed completely. Schneidau was always willing to improve the prison conditions as far as the rules would permit. His wife, who like him considered the prisoners human beings, sent dozens of parcels to the prison on Christmas Day, so that the men who had no families would not be entirely forgotten.

Schneidau, too, was loyal to the old régime, and found it difficult to adjust himself to post-war conditions in Germany. He was hated by the other warders for his kindness to the prisoners, and they made things very difficult for him whenever they could.

The methods which prisoners sometimes use to be taken to the hospital are terrible. One of my fellow prisoners, for instance, asked the warder for a cigarette. The warder could not, of course, grant this request because it was against the prison rules, but the prisoner said that he would not give up his spoon unless he received a cigarette in return. When the warder persistently refused, the prisoner broke up the tin spoon and swallowed it. He was taken to the hospital and operated on.

Another prisoner who wanted to be taken to hospital slit open his skin with a needle and inserted into it a tiny glass tube which he had taken from the hospital. He then blew air underneath his skin. As a result he had to be taken to hospital.

There was a wireless apparatus in the schoolroom at Gross Strehlitz. Once a week prisoners with a good record were taken to the schoolroom, where they were allowed to listen to the wireless for an hour. Every six months or every year concerts were organised in the prison. In Sonnenburg Mrs. Lemke, the wife of one of the prison officials, did a great deal for these concerts. It is difficult for an outsider to appreciate what it means to a prisoner, who has spent weeks in solitary confinement, to hear some music.

Concerts and lectures, which have been organised in various prisons during the last few years, do [not make it easier for the prisoners to adjust themselves to life after they have left prison. It is as true as ever that in prison men become less law-abiding than they were previously.

* * * * *

The Director of the Prussian Prisons, whose office was in Berlin, had heard about the bad conditions in the Sonnenburg prison. A young lawyer was therefore appointed governor of the prison. After his arrival, the new governor made a little speech to the inspector and warders, in which he told them that humane treatment was the most effective way to improve the prisoners' character. He said that if the older warders were unable to change their attitude it would be better for them to change their jobs. As a result of this speech the new governor, whose name was Dronsch, was bitterly attacked by many of the older warders and prison officials. The chief inspector, a man named Axthelm, continued to hold up prisoners' letters, even though the new governor had forbidden this.

We reported this fact to the governor, who investigated the situation himself. He found piles of letters in the inspector's office, most of which had been held up for weeks or even months. Unfortunately the inspector was not dismissed from the prison, but was given another job. He was put in charge of the prison files, where he had even greater opportunities to harm the prisoners. Finally I com-

plained to the Director of the Prussian prisons, and as a result the inspector was dismissed altogether.

The cashier, a man named Zanke, who kicked the prisoners when they did not do exactly as he wished, was among the officials who opposed most actively the new governor.

When I was taken back to my cell after my second special confinement, I noticed that there was a new neighbour in the next cell. He was walking up and down so restlessly that I knocked at the wall, and asked whether he had received bad news. He said that he had just been beaten by some of the warders, and that he had already complained. He asked me whether I had any tobacco. Unfortunately I had none, for I had not smoked for months. Then he said that he could give me some. He said that he would wrap some tobacco and matches in a little package which he would hang outside the window on a string attached to the broom in his cell. He told me I could put my hand outside my window and take the parcel. We arranged that he would knock at the wall when he was ready.

The same moment the door to my cell was opened, and the governor and the chief inspector came in. The governor asked me why I was not working, and I told him that I refused to perform monotonous labour for four pfennige a day. While he was talking to me I was horrified to hear my neighbour knocking on the wall. A little package attached to a string appeared in front of my window. The chief inspector rushed into the next cell and found my

neighbour standing on his table dangling my present outside the window. As a reward for his kindness to me the poor fellow was punished with four weeks special confinement.

Every time I returned from my exercise in the courtyard I was forced to undress and to hand over all my clothes. In return I was given another prison suit. By this measure, which irritated me profoundly, the governor hoped to prevent my hiding letters or articles in my pockets. A special sieve had to be attached to my bucket, and the warders were faced with the unpleasant task of searching it for small secret slips of paper.

The food in Gross Strehlitz was so bad that many prisoners refused to work. Once I found part of a boot brush in the soup. The food was absolutely tasteless; one did not know whether one was eating peas, beans, or lentils. All the food for six or seven hundred men was cooked in steam and not in water. As a result all the food smelt of the steamer. Even if one was very hungry one could not always eat the food, for the smell was so strong that it turned one's stomach. According to the regulations the prisoners were to be given fresh vegetables when they were in season. In practice, however, we were usually given dried vegetables which were years old. I finally sent a detailed report about the food in Gross Strehlitz to the Judicial Committee of the Prussian Diet.

The governor in Gross Strehlitz was particularly hostile to the 'League for the Rights of Man.' He

kept the league's magazine, which was sent to me, for a year. After agitating for months I was finally allowed to write a letter to the league. Most of the prisoners were not permitted to do so because the governor was afraid that the league might do something for us. It would be well for the league to send young lawyers to visit various prisons from time to time. This procedure might have some practical results, and would enable the league to investigate at first hand miscarriages of justice.

CHAPTER XIV

FREEDOM

WHILE I was in Gross Strehlitz I again made an effort to have my case taken up again by the courts. In 1922 one of my lawyers had petitioned for a resumption of the case. His petition was refused, but it did result in an admission by the Special Court of Justice established under the law for the 'Protection of the Republic'* that there was some doubt as to the murder of Hess. I had no desire to question the fact that I had been sentenced for high treason, breach of the peace, and so forth, even though in some cases I had been accused of other people's actions. In my opinion a revolutionary must always be prepared to serve a term of several years imprisonment. All I wanted to prove was that I had been sentenced for the murder of Hess so that all revolutionaries might appear to be common murderers. I realised that to prove my case I needed a clever lawyer. Differences of opinion had forced me to sever connection with the lawyers who had conducted my case up to now. I felt that my case was

* This law, which provided special safeguards against treason, insurrection, and attacks (both in word and deed) on Republican leaders and institutions, was passed after the murder of Walther Rathenau in 1922.

such a good example that it would help to show up political injustice. I also felt that my persistence would be an example for my comrades.

Comrade Arthur Dombrowski was most helpful to me. As soon as he was dismissed from prison he began to work on my case with indefatigable loyalty. His investigations of my case were so successful that the Communist Party, as well as the Red Help, became interested in the retrial of my case in the courts.

At first I could not find a suitable lawyer. I asked my friend Egon Erwin Kisch to find an energetic lawyer for me. Kisch suggested Dr. Apfel. I accepted this suggestion, and Dr. Apfel was asked by the Red Help to act as my lawyer. Apfel went at once to the district where the Central German insurrection had been fought, and investigated the situation thoroughly at first hand. He was a member of a *bourgeois* party, and therefore studied my case with complete objectivity. As a result many members of the Communist Party disapproved of him. Apfel never distorted my political views, and because of his good connections he was able to interest a number of leading newspapers in my case.

A neutral committee was organised to create renewed interest in the affair. The committee included men such as Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Stefan Zweig, Rudolf G. Binding, Dr. Emanuel Lasker, Professor Albert Einstein, Freiherr von Schoenaich, Professor Carl Grünberg and Professor Dessauer. They drafted petitions on my behalf,

which were signed by people belonging to all political parties and all professions. Many of them were not revolutionary at all, but became interested in my case because they believed that justice should be done in every *bourgeois* state.

Apart from directing all the publicity work in connection with my case, Dr. Apfel collected all the factual details necessary to prove my innocence. In this work he was ably assisted by Felix Halles and Dr. Kurt Rosenfeld. Apfel was not even discouraged when the public prosecutor in Halle refused to take up the case of a man named Friehe, who himself confessed to having murdered Hess. Erich Mühsam's pamphlet *Justice for Max Hoelz*, of which fifty thousand copies were sold, did a great deal to awaken public interest in my case. Arthur Holitscher, Egon Erwin Kisch, Ernst Toller, Armin T. Wegner, and other members of the neutral committee began to write newspaper articles in which they stated my case. Egon Erwin Kisch published my own letters written in prison, as well as a pamphlet called *A Judicial Scandal*.* In the summer of 1927 Dr. Apfel came to see me in Gross Strehlitz. He brought with him Comrade Sling, who was well known as a member of the staff of the *Vossische Zeitung*. This *bourgeois* journalist, who wanted to help not only me but everyone who had suffered from a miscarriage of justice, became a great friend of mine. Sling's articles in the *Vossische Zeitung* created a considerable stir. Shortly after

* 7 Jahre Justizskandal.

I had met Sling, Dr. Apfel brought Rudolf Olden to see me. He too, was very active on my behalf. Olden had no sympathy whatever with the Communist movement, but he was a man who believed firmly in justice. Some of my Communist friends outside and inside the prison objected to my friendship with Sling, Olden, Holitscher, Toller, and A. T. Wegner, because they thought that my association with these *bourgeois* intellectuals would separate me from the working classes. Their fears were unfounded. Personally I believe that it is a tactical error from the Communist point of view to consider every intellectual a *bourgeois* enemy. It is our function to win men for the Communist movement, and to do so we must associate with them.

Dr. Apfel and Felix Halle drafted a petition for the resumption of my case. This petition, which was printed in an edition of many thousands, was sent to all well known lawyers, as well as to members of Parliament. The original was sent to the Supreme Court in Leipzig, and as a result the resumption of my case was sanctioned.

Towards the end of August, 1927, I was moved to the convict prison at Sonnenburg, at my lawyer's request, for the great distance between Berlin and Gross Strehlitz made it too difficult for him to see me. The day before I was taken to Sonnenburg Sacco and Vanzetti were murdered by the American *bourgeoisie*. For five years I had seen nothing of the outside world, and I had been looking forward to

the journey to Sonnenburg, but the fate of these two Italians depressed me so profoundly that I could not enjoy anything. I had never thought that the American courts would dare to kill these two men after their seven years imprisonment. The terrible uncertainty which they had suffered was far worse than a quick death or my own seven years imprisonment.

I considered it a provocation that Governor Adamietz accompanied me to Sonnenburg so that he could deliver me in person. If my lawyer had not been present I would have told him again what I thought of him. It was characteristic of him that he came to my cell the day after my arrival in Sonnenburg and told me that he was my best friend. A few days later two warders from Gross Strehlitz, who had brought some prisoners to Sonnenburg told me that Adamietz was so glad to get rid of me that he gave a party to celebrate the event as soon as he got back.

The convict prison in Sonnenburg had a more friendly appearance than the prisons in Münster, Breslau, and Gross Strehlitz, the walls being white-washed. I knew the governor at Sonnenburg, because he had once spent two weeks in Gross Strehlitz. I was kindly received, and the governor was equally kind to all the prisoners. There were, for instance, pots of flowers on the table in all the cells, as well as elsewhere in the prison.

My cell was so small that I could not possibly do my exercises in it. The governor therefore had me

moved to a double cell. In Sonnenburg I was permitted to spend some time every day with four fellow prisoners in my cell. There were twenty-seven other Communist prisoners in Sonnenburg; some of them were discharged a short time after my arrival, their time being up. These comrades were men who came up to my ideals of what a Communist should be — they were fearless, dependable fighters. When I talked to them I realised for the first time how shy and difficult my long isolation had made me.

There had been an old warder in Gross Strehlitz who was particularly popular among the prisoners, because he was really more humane than the regulations permitted. He was a unique type of man. When he knew that the prisoners understood his gruff manners he always called them a 'heap of dung.' We realised that for him this meant a term of affection. I had become so used to the expression 'heap of dung' that I used it towards my comrades in Sonnenburg. At first they were furious, and told me that they would not put up with the expression.

On the whole the prisoners in Sonnenburg were better treated than those in Gross Strehlitz. The Chief of the Berlin-Brandenburg prisons, Geheimrat Finkelnburg, is a well known reformer of the prison system, which would indeed be improved if other prison administrators shared his views. Finkelnburg had succeeded in preventing the maltreatment of prisoners in a number of prisons, but even under his administration the system had

remained fundamentally the same. It cannot be basically changed until the capitalist system of society has been abolished.

Gymnastic exercises are the one thing which kept me going during my years of imprisonment. In some prisons exercises are obligatory for prisoners between twenty and twenty-five years of age. Once or twice a week they are given exercises on gymnastic appliances which stand in the courtyard. In the Sonnenburg prison the gymnasium was well equipped.

It is quite clear that prisoners should be given something to divert their minds. In some prisons a few of the men are allowed to keep birds as pets in their cells. A number of prisoners had for years asked in vain to be allowed this privilege. To help them out I asked to be allowed to keep some birds myself, although I did not really wish to do so, as I could not bear to see these creatures in a cage. When my request was granted I told the other prisoners that I had been allowed to keep birds, and they should ask again to be allowed to do the same. They were overjoyed when their request was granted.

In October, 1927,* shortly before the 'Hindenburg Amnesty' was made known, many of the prisoners were very restless. Many of the men who had been convicted because of their crimes, as well as the political prisoners, hoped that their names would be included in the list. Personally I did not believe

* President Hindenburg's eightieth birthday.

that the authorities would bring me within the scope of the amnesty. I began to realise that eventually I would be released, because public opinion had turned in my favour. A number of my comrades had suggested plans of escape to me, but I had refused for political reasons. The campaign for the release of all Communist prisoners, conducted by the Red Help, had found enthusiastic support among workers and intellectuals. In September, 1927, the Communist Party had submitted a Bill for an amnesty law to Parliament. The other parties opposed this Bill, so that it was not submitted to the judicial parliamentary committee until the 9th of March, 1928. The Communist Party had worked indefatigably for years to bring about the release of their imprisoned comrades.

I felt sure that I would be released before the end of 1928. I was increasingly frightened of my return to freedom. The relatively decent treatment I had received in Sonnenburg had made me far less bitter, but I was still in such a nervous state that I did not know how a sudden return to normal life would affect me. I hoped after my release that I might retire to the country and spend my time in physical labour on a farm, and I wondered whether this plan would be feasible. I longed for freedom with all my being, but on the other hand I was terribly frightened. My association with the comrades in Sonnenburg had shown me how difficult it would be for me to live with other people again. I loved

people, but I suffered acutely when I was in a crowd.

During the early summer the political as well as the criminal prisoners in Sonnenburg were greatly excited because it became known that the consideration of the Communist Bill for the release of political prisoners had again been postponed. The prisoners became so bitter that they almost revolted. If Governor Lüdecke had been less tactful the prisoners would undoubtedly have mutinied. Later, when a number of warders and officials of Sonnenburg prison were tried for bribery, a number of them claimed that the disorganisation of the prison staff had occurred because the governor was too good-natured. I should like to state that I consider them entirely wrong, for if the governor had assumed a harsher attitude a serious revolt among the prisoners would undoubtedly have taken place. Personally I had many disagreements with the governor, because he was prejudiced against all Communists, but I must admit that he was the kind of man who always tried to settle disputes in a peaceful manner. He never used force unless he was obliged to do so.

To protest against the postponement of the Amnesty Bill we Communists at once organised a united hunger-strike. At the same time we hoped that this strike would result in other gains, such as permission to write to our families whenever we wanted to, and permission to have light in our cells from ten to twelve o'clock at night. We were also trying to be allowed to carry on our gymnastic

exercises together in the courtyard. We told the governor that if our hunger-strike did not succeed we would try by other means to attain our ends. Four of the Communists had tuberculosis, and we advised them not to take part in the hunger-strike. They disregarded our wishes, and the prison doctor said that their lives were in danger. Thereupon the rest of us decided to give up our hunger-strike and try other methods of passive resistance. A number of criminal prisoners had joined us in our strike, for they wanted to protest against the fact that amnesties were granted only to political prisoners. Several Communist members of the Prussian Diet, as well as Dr. Kurt Rosenfeld, who was a member of Parliament, came to Sonnenburg to urge us to give up our hunger strike, on account of the harm it would do to the four comrades who had tuberculosis. For that reason we gave it up.

The renewed postponement of the Amnesty Bill, however, caused us to begin a new and more bitter fight. As soon as it grew dark we each stood near the window of his cell and recited revolutionary verses, and sang Communist songs. Hundreds of people, attracted by this noise, congregated in the streets below. At first these curiosity seekers would laugh at the songs we sang, but they all grew serious when at midnight the two dozen Communist prisoners began to recite Erich Mühsam's poem *Lenin is Dead*. We often continued our recitations throughout the night. The people living in the houses near the prison could not sleep, and com-

plained to the governor. The governor did everything he could to stop us. We hung red flags out of our cell windows. Even the most sadistic warders were afraid to take the flags away. When the governor himself came to our cells and asked us to remove them we did so, because our fight was not, after all, directed against him personally, and we wanted to spare him as much as we could.

The Amnesty Act was passed by Parliament on the 14th of July, and on the 16th and 17th a number of political prisoners were released. This law was not, however, what we had expected, because only a few prisoners were actually released. Many of those who had been given their freedom refused to leave the prison until their comrades had been amnestied as well. The warders were obliged, therefore, to take the amnestied men out of the prison by force. A comrade named Witkowski, who had been seriously wounded in the war, and who had been imprisoned for nine years, clung to me and said that he would not leave until I, too, had been given my freedom. The warders were obliged to carry him out of the prison. On the 18th of July the prison administration received a telegram from the Supreme Court in Leipzig in which it was stated that my case was to be tried anew and that I was to be discharged from prison. The resistance of judicial organisations to my release had at length been broken by the persistent efforts of the Red Help, the German Communist Party, the brilliant ability of Dr. Apfel and Felix Halle, as well as by

the publicity campaign organised by authors and journalists such as Sling, Rudolf Olden, Thomas Mann, Erich Mühsam, Egon Erwin Kisch, Arthur Holitscher, Ernst Toller and Armin T. Wegner.

I was free, but at first I could not believe it. I thought that the telegram must be a forgery, by means of which I was to be taken to another prison. The governor, on the other hand, thought that it had been sent by fellow members of the Communist Party to help me escape. He telephoned to Leipzig, and was told that I was to leave the prison within an hour. The governor also told me that my lawyer had telephoned to say that he was leaving for Sonnenburg to call for me. Gradually I began to believe that I was to be released, but I did not feel the slightest joy at the thought. I resolved not to leave without my four fellow prisoners who had not been amnestied.

The telegram had come at four o'clock in the afternoon. Dr. Apfel, with his wife and his secretary, as well as my friend Egon Erwin Kisch, arrived from Berlin in a motor car at six o'clock. I refused to go with them unless my comrades were also released. We had a heated argument, in which the governor took part. He said that if I did not leave the prison within half an hour he would have me removed by force. Apfel and Kisch tried to explain to me that I could do more for their release outside the prison than if I remained. I gave way, and took leave of my comrades, promising them that I would force the authorities to send me back to prison if I could

not bring about their release. I have not forgotten this promise, which I shall keep as soon as I have finished this book.

My lawyer's motor car stood in the courtyard. Some of the warders who had been kind to me, as they were to all the other prisoners, came to say good-bye to me. Then the motor car carried me away from the prison and back into freedom.

I cannot express what I felt. Everything seemed a miracle, and I expected to awaken from a dream and find myself on the plank bed in my cell. When we had driven a short way I asked my companions to have the car stopped. I said that I could not go to Berlin at once in any circumstances, that the sudden change from a prison to a large city would be too great a shock. I asked them to stop in some small town for the night. We stopped in Küstrin, and took rooms in an hotel, where I registered under an assumed name. Kisch ordered dinner, but I could hardly eat. I was overcome by a terrible depression at the thought of my four friends whom I had left behind. I felt like running away and returning to Sonnenburg.

I asked Kisch to order some wine, as I thought this would help me. We were soon joined by Comrades Schlör and Geschke, who had discovered where we were. I was terrified lest other comrades should join us as well, for I was afraid of meeting a crowd of people.

At a quarter to two Kisch and I went to our bedroom. It was the first time for eight years that

I had slept in a real bed. I could not sleep, because I was so accustomed to a hard cot and very thin coverings. At a quarter to four I jumped up and did an hour's exercise, while Kisch went on snoring. Then I wakened my lawyer and told him that I wanted to leave the hotel at once, as I was afraid that many comrades might come there to see me.

At about five o'clock my lawyer, his wife and secretary, and I took a train for Berlin. I begged Dr. Apfel to find me a quiet place to stay at in Berlin.

In the train I could hardly control myself. I began to weep without knowing why I did so. My depression increased. We passed fields and houses and bridges, as well as people who were not wearing prison garb. I was so depressed that I felt again the misery I had suffered during the first night I spent in prison. It seemed impossible for me to think of my future. My three companions were tactful enough not to try to comfort me. I think if anyone had spoken to me I should have jumped out of the window.

When we reached Berlin I spent the day locked up in a room in my lawyer's office. In the evening comrades Golke and Schlör came to take me to a mass meeting which the Berlin workers had organised for me. I shall never forget the sight of these crowds of people, and it was necessary for me to summon all my self-control to prevent myself beginning to weep again as I had in the train. I felt that the crowd of people before me were not rejoicing only in my

freedom, but that each and all of them fervently believed in the ultimate victory of the Revolution. The waves of enthusiasm which swayed the crowd made me realise that hundreds of Communist prisoners had not suffered in their prisons in vain. The little Communist Party of 1920 and 1921 had increased enormously. As I stood amidst this crowd I realised that I had not been released from prison because the courts admitted the injustice they had inflicted upon me, but because the masses had forced them to release me. I was so moved that I could not speak.

After my years of solitary confinement the city streets seemed to me like a fairy tale. The motor traffic, the crowds of people, and the gay shop windows, made a tremendous impression upon me. I could hardly tear my eyes away from the sights, and when friends spoke to me I found it difficult to concentrate on what they said. Whenever I spent any time with my friends I felt a tremendous longing to be alone. It was torment for me to be among people and even now, six months after my discharge from prison, I feel the same.

A few days after my arrival in Berlin I returned to the district of the Central German insurrection. I was enthusiastically received in Bitterfeld, Halle, Ammendorf, Merseburg, Eisleben, and Hettstedt. I was especially glad to see Heinrich Wiekowski, with whom I had been in Sonnenburg prison, in Ammendorf. A distressing incident occurred at my reception at the station in Bitterfeld.

I noticed that several members of the Communist 'Red Front'* were trying to hold back a man who was pressing through the crowd holding a huge bouquet of flowers. The man smelled so strongly of alcohol that he made me nervous, and I pushed him away. I was deeply upset when I heard that this man was Scheidiker, who had fought with me in the Central German insurrection. At that time he had been a splendid fellow, but after several years of imprisonment he was no longer able to adjust himself, and he had gone to the dogs.

After my discharge from prison the Red Help asked me to speak in a hundred meetings organised on behalf of the Communist prisoners who were still in gaol. I was only able to speak in a few of these meetings, because I had promised to write a book about my experiences in prison. This book was to be dedicated to Russian and German criminal as well as political prisoners.

To write this book I needed solitude. I felt very unhappy among so many people, and when I spoke in meetings I could not find my words.

After a meeting in Hanover I went to see my parents, who had suffered more than I had. I had suffered for the sake of an ideal in which I completely believed, but my parents, who did not believe, had a much harder time. After my arrest they had been forced to leave their home in Saxony, for their lives were made unbearable, even though people knew that they did not agree with my views.

* *Rote Frontkämpfer* – a kind of Communist boy scout movement.

I was deeply moved when my father told me that after the *Kapp-Putsch* he first planned to give me up altogether. The old man felt that if I had committed all the crimes attributed to me by the *bourgeois* Press he would disown me. He went to the Town Hall in his home town to disown me legally, but the mayor persuaded him not to do so, saying that my aim was not a bad one, and that only the methods I had chosen to attain it were wrong.

After I left Hanover I went to the Black Forest, where I visited a man from Darmstadt, who had been a member of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, and was therefore bitterly hated by the reactionaries. This man, whose name was Heyd, and who was an engineer, had bought a little house for his family in the village of Todtmoos-Hütte in the Black Forest. It was here that I hoped to write my book.

I did not want anyone to come to see me, nor did I want to create any stir by my presence, so I chose a pseudonym for the duration of my stay. The Prussian Ministry of Justice was quite willing for me to do so as long as I reported to them whenever I moved.

I had hoped to begin my book as soon as I reached Heyd's house in the Black Forest. At first I could make no progress at all, for I had never written a book and I found writing extremely difficult. It was also difficult for me to overcome the inhibitions which had become ingrained in me in prison. Although I had been practically a teetotaller I now

drank considerable quantities every day to help me write. I was always hungry and thirsty. But, after weeks of effort, I was able to write without drinking. I began in fact to feel an aversion for too much food and drink. I began to write easily and every page I wrote or dictated was a relief.

I forced myself to write, although during my years of imprisonment I had longed only to resume my fight for the working classes. After my discharge, however, I was not able to do so until I had written my book, and corrected all the erroneous statements about myself which the Press had circulated.



FROM
WHITE CROSS
TO
RED FLAG



MAX HOELZ